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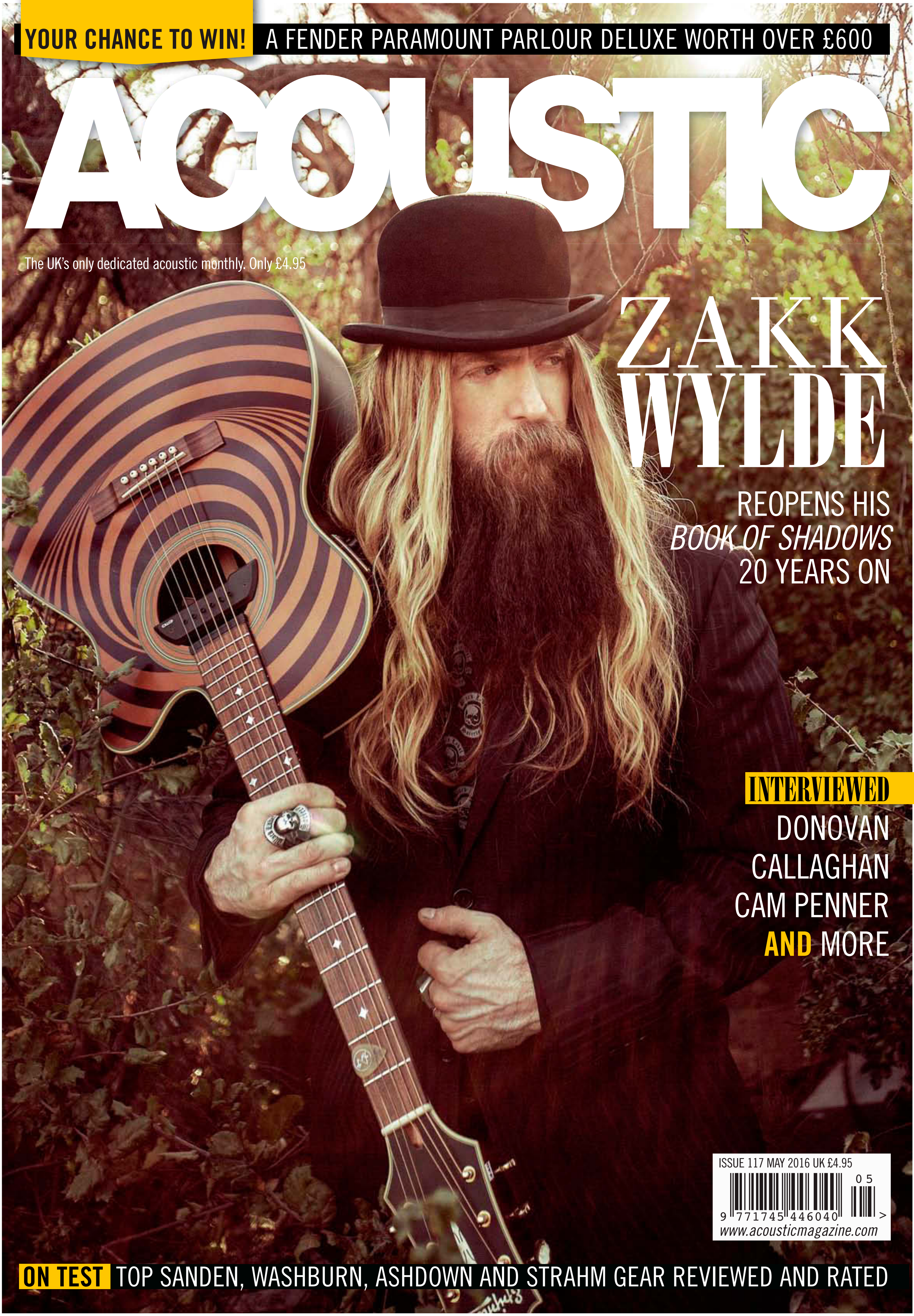

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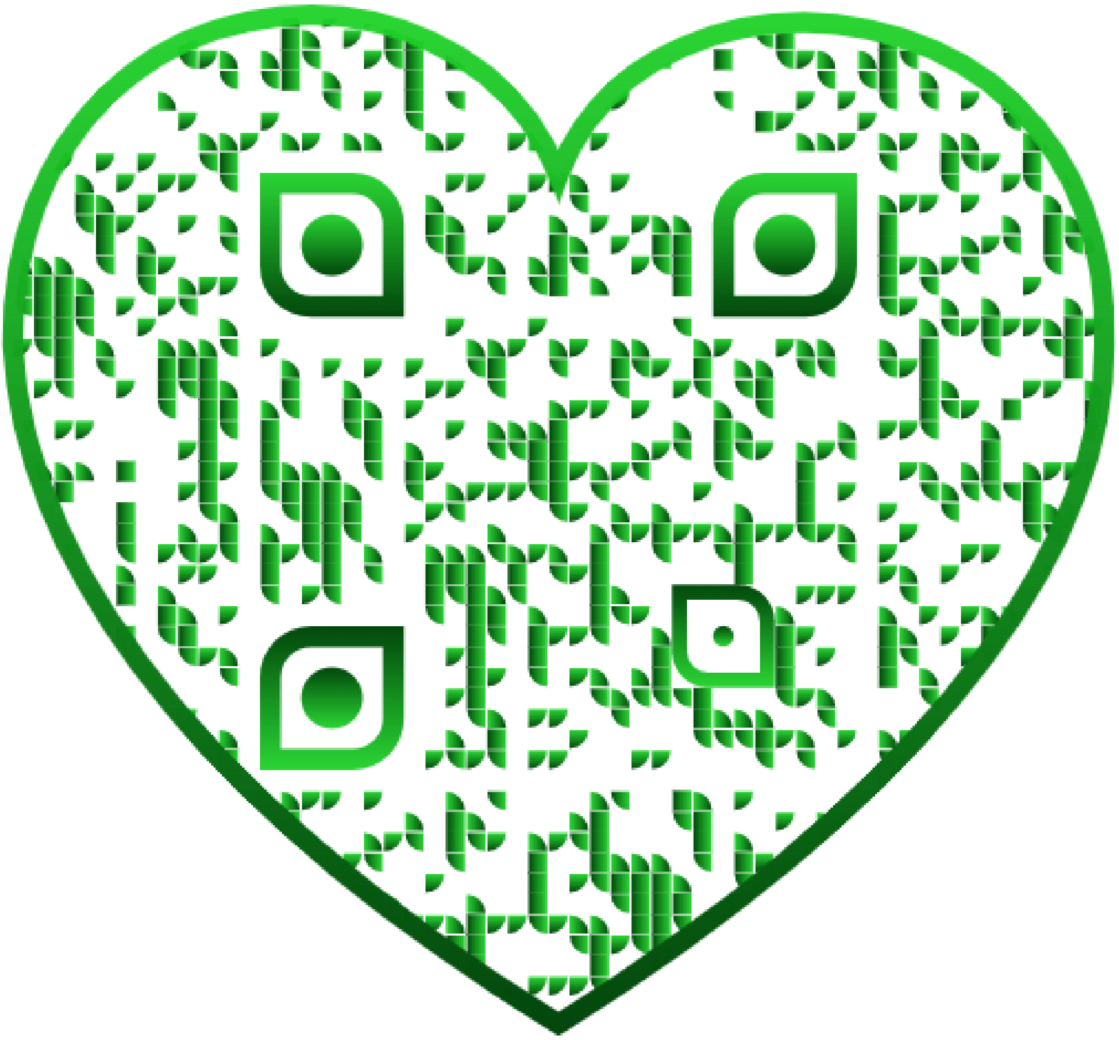

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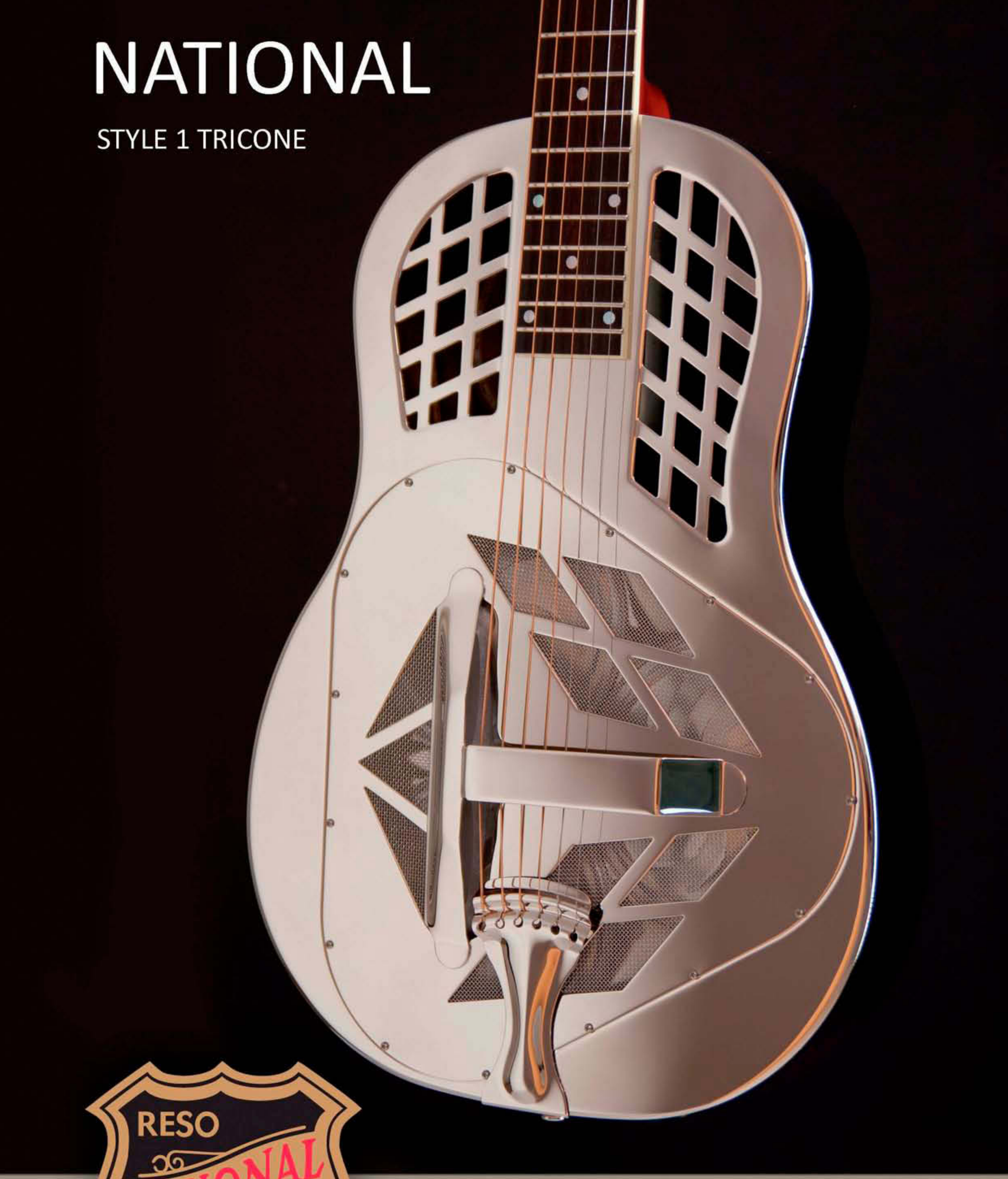

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THE ROOT NOTE

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Over the last few issues in particular, *Acoustic* has reviewed a batch of Asian-made, mid-range guitars, all of which emerged with flying colours. I'm often asked why we only run 'good' reviews, and why is it that we don't seem to publish any 'bad' reviews. Now is as good a time as any to answer those questions. Primarily, there are two reasons for this.

For one, modern production techniques are better than they have ever been and the use of CNC machinery has resulted in a high standard of consistency. Simply put, guitars being produced in Asia, in fact pretty much anywhere around the world, are of such a high standard of construction these days that we rarely, if ever, are in receipt of review guitars that could justifiably receive a bad review.

Secondly, we believe that publishing a review of a guitar is in itself an endorsement. In the rare and unlikely scenario we receive a review guitar which had problems or issues, we'd simply send it back explaining to the supplier why we have chosen not to feature the guitar within our pages. It's worth nothing that, in my time as an editor, this has only happened once and the issues were down to mistreatment by Mr Courier.

We hope that the above explanation will give you, our valued readers, confidence in the products we select to put before you. Truth is, it's never been better for a consumer of acoustic guitars. The guitar sector as a whole is extremely competitive, and this also helps to keep standards high and prices down. So if you're in the market for a new guitar, whether your budget is major or minor, the guitars we've reviewed for you are as good a starting point as any!

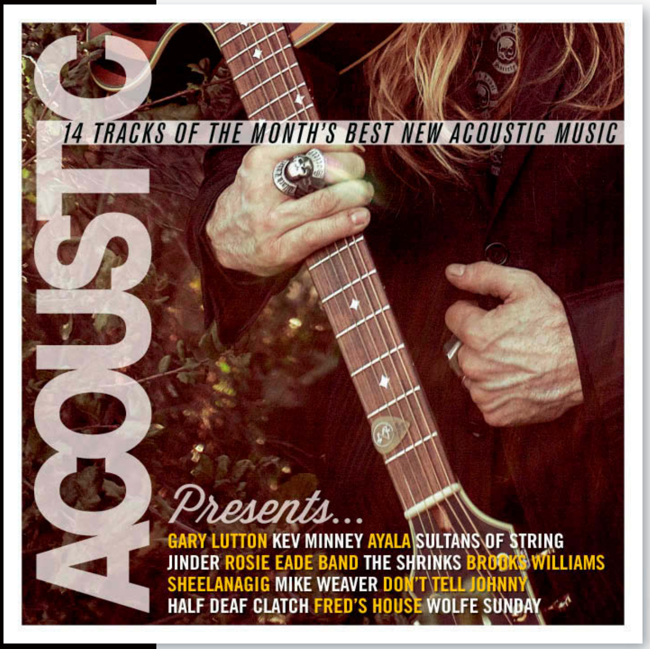
Finally, we want to let you know that we are hard at work putting together the forthcoming London Acoustic Show. Put the dates in your diary: 10-11 September at Olympia London. Some fantastic acts have already been secured, news of which will be announced in the next issue. Exhibitors are picking their plots and we can already see that there will be a fantastic array of product on show for you to peruse, play with and pick. Tickets will be on sale soon, so keep an eye on www.londonacousticshow.com.

In the meantime, enjoy the issue.

Steve Harvey
Editor

ACOUSTIC *Presents...*

14 TRACKS OF THE MONTH'S BEST NEW ACOUSTIC MUSIC



01

GARY LUTTON
SLIPSTREAM

Gary Lutton is an instrumental acoustic guitarist from Belfast. He won the Sky competition *Guitar Star* (2015) in which he had the opportunity to work with legends such as Rodrigo y Gabriela, Mike Dawes and Paco Pena. He recorded at Abbey Road Studios with producer Tony Visconti and played the main stage at Latitude festival for 30,000 people.

Gary's first EP, Departure, is a four-track affair featuring two originals and two arrangements that has been mixed and mastered by Eric Spitzer-Marlyn at the Hitbox Altenburg (of U2, Brian Eno and Thomas Leeb fame).

- ***www.facebook.com/garyluttonmusic***
- ***www.twitter.com/garyluttonmusic***

05

JINDER
GATHERING MY CHILDREN HOME

Over 15 years, 2,000 live shows and nine lovingly crafted albums of exquisite folk-noir-sadcore songwriting, Jinder has emerged as one of the most prolific and enigmatic figures of the UK music scene. Despite releases for Sony BMG and Universal, a commercial crossover has never really been on the cards and Jinder remains something of a cult artist, albeit with a fervent following among those in the know.

'Gathering My Children Home' is taken from 2015's critically acclaimed *Traditional Dark* LP, recorded entirely to tape in an abandoned West Country cottage in late 2014.

- ***www.jinder.co.uk***
- ***www.facebook.com/jindermusic***
- ***www.twitter.com/mmjinder***

06

ROSIE EADE BAND
ASHAMED

Inspired by Kate Bush and The Who as much as Steeleye Span, Rosie sings life inspired stories written over many years gigging solo around the country, from a party in a field to Glastonbury's Avalon Café, arranged around her love of folk, rock and thrashing her old guitar. This dual passion shines through in her new album Battlestorm, which tells of the many battles and conflicts, emotional and physical, faced in our modern and historical lives. These are heartfelt tales brought to life by Rosie, Challow Park Studios, and her band mates Steve Matthews (mandolin), Simon Stanley (bass) and Niall Robinson (drums).

- ***www.twitter.com/folk_pixie***
- ***www.facebook.com/rosieeadefolkpixie***

10

MIKE WEAVER
PEMBROKESHIRE FAIR

Mike Weaver is a singer-songwriter who draws upon contemporary and traditional influences from both sides of the Atlantic. After break of 17 years, Mike returned to songwriting and performing and released CD of original songs in August 2014.

His latest album, *The Others* (March 2016) is a collection of previously unreleased material, together with new songs including the single 'Pembrokeshire Fair'. A fingerstyle guitarist, Mike always performs solo and records his music live to reflect the directness and simplicity of his gigs, creating a strong focus on the lyrics.

- ***www.mikeweavermusic.com***
- ***www.twitter.com/MikeWeaver10***
- ***www.facebook.com/mikeweavermusic***

11

DON'T TELL JOHNNY
BEYOND YOUR WILDEST DREAMS

Don't Tell Johnny are a Wales and West Country based folk band that play a range of acoustic styles from folk and blues to Americana. Their music combines touching, emotional vocals and harmonies, beautiful finger picked guitar and scorching fiddle lines to evoke memorable moods and feelings. Towards the end of 2015 the band started work on their debut album *Better Late Than Never*, a collection of 10 original songs. The album was recorded by Paul Hobday at Scabby Road Studios in Chepstow and was released in February 2016.

- ***www.donttelljohnny.com***
- ***www.facebook.com/donttelljohnny4***
- ***www.soundcloud.com/dont-tell-johnny***

02

KEV MINNEY
ALL YOU NEED

Kev Minney is a Brighton based songwriter. Using his voice, his guitar playing and his songwriting skills he has created a unique and mastered sound. Taking inspiration from folk greats such as Simon & Garfunkel, Neil Young and Nick Drake, he has blended his creative guitar playing with pop and folk melodies.

His debut EP *All You Need* was recorded and produced in New York by Kenny Siegal at Old Soul Studios. Taking a modern approach to traditional singer-songwriter folk, the EP combines a mix of pop tracks with all the depth it takes to keep you listening and time and time again.

- ***www.facebook.com/kevminney***
- ***www.youtube.com/kevinminney***

03

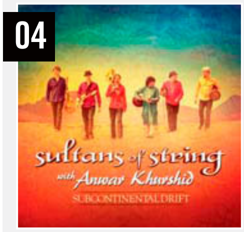
AYALA
THIS YEAR

Ayala's debut album *This Year* was produced between LA and London by Fabio BOI Angelini (Pink), Juan Luis Ayala (Gabrielle) and Troy Miller (Amy Winehouse, Laura Mvula), and is a beautiful blend of British pop with folk and blues as well as touches of the more exotic Mexican/Latin flavours. Plans for 2016 include the release of a duet with the multi-platinum selling artist Gilbert O'Sullivan on his new single 'I Guess I'll Always Love You', as well as plans to launch into the Mexican and Latin market.

Ayala can also be seen presenting her own live music TV show on Irish TV (Sky 191).

- ***www.facebook.com/musicofayala***
- ***www.twitter.com/musicofayala***
- ***www.instagram/musicofayala***

04



SULTANS OF STRING
RAKES OF MALLOW – ROUGE RIVER VALLEY

Sultans Of String create "energetic and exciting music from a band with talent to burn!" (*Maverick Magazine*). Thrilling audiences with their genre-hopping passport of Celtic reels, flamenco, gypsy-jazz, Arabic, Cuban, and South Asian rhythms, the band combines fiery violin dances with kinetic guitar. Since forming 10 years ago, Sultans Of String have hit #1 across Canada on top 10 national radio charts, and received multiple awards and accolades, including two Juno (Canada's Grammy) nominations and two Canadian Folk Music Awards.

- ***www.facebook.com/sultansofstring***
- ***www.twitter.com/sultansofstring***

07

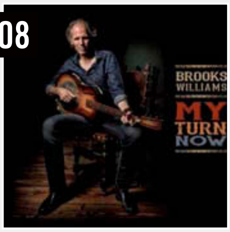
THE SHRINKS
MAYBE WE DID

Bristol-based septet the Shrinks, have for the last 16 years, been creating music best described as a strange looking, yet at the same time, strangely familiar car that has been welded together from several other cars.

It may be rusty in places and perhaps doesn't get out on the road as often as it should but, when it's firing on all cylinders, it can really move and transport you to some pretty unusual places. Enjoy the ride.

- ***www.theshrinks.com***

08



BROOKS WILLIAMS
NINE DAYS' WONDER

Brooks Williams stands on tradition but he doesn't stand still. Born in Statesboro, Georgia, Williams got his start in the clubs and bars around New York and Boston. There he developed his signature roots sound and honed his craft as both a songwriter, a singer, and a performer.

With 22 albums to his name, including his newest, *My Turn Now* (2016), Williams' music has been lauded by the likes of *Guitar Player, Blues Matters, Acoustic, Maverick*, and WUMB-FM Boston. Like drinking whiskey from a honey jar, you get both the sweet and the bite.

- ***www.facebook.com/brookswilliamsguitar***
- ***www.twitter.com/BrooksRedGuitar***

09

SHEELANAGIG
SHETLAG

Sheelanagig have become something of a West Country institution for the past decade. A quintet with a well-stocked armoury of stringed instruments and a bagful of joint-jumping tunes, these boys sure know how to get a party started. Putting both stomp and skank into gypsy-flavoured tunes from the Balkans and beyond, it's difficult for your limbs to remain stationary when you're within earshot of them in full flight. Five showmen with a touch of the circus about them, the fact that they've often play with a knowing wink shouldn't obscure their impeccable technique and virtuoso-standard ability that raises the roof in every place they play.

- ***www.sheelanagig.co.uk***
- ***www.facebook.com/sheelanagigmusic***
- ***www.twitter.com/sheelanagig***

12

HALF DEAF CLATCH
BOXCAR BULLDOGS

Drawing from his obsession with pre-war country blues, Half Deaf Clatch has been impressing audiences all over the UK for the last five years with his raw down-home sound and his original songwriting.

He has been nominated in the finals of the British Blues Awards eight times in the last three years, and recently played on the daytime line-up of the 2015 Prudential Bluesfest at London's 02 Arena. His new album *The Life and Death of A.J Rail* was released in October 2015 and is a one-man blues and roots tour de force.

- ***www.halfdeafclatch.com***
- ***www.facebook.com/halfdeafclatch***
- ***www.twitter.com/halfdeafclatch***

13

FRED'S HOUSE
EARTHQUAKE

Fred's House are turning heads on the acoustic music scene and touring at venues and festivals all over the UK. Their 70s West Coast-inspired vocal harmonies, catchy songs and entertaining live shows has everyone talking. The beautifully penned track 'Earthquake' is full of raw emotion and is taken from their new album *Faultlines*, which is out in May 2016. Faultlines very much highlights why this band are going places

- ***www.fredshousemusic.co.uk***
- ***www.facebook.com/fredshousemusic***
- ***www.twitter.com/fredshousemusic***

14

WOLFE SUNDAY
GO OUT TO SEA

For the last three years Wolfe Sunday has spent most of his time on the road, bringing his unique blend of folk-punk all over the UK and Europe. Combining intelligent and witty lyrics with an energetic live set and a burning passion for music, Wolfe Sunday is an unmissable and unforgettable act. If you have never seen an acoustic musician climb the walls of a venue, you've never seen Wolfe Sunday perform. The brand new album *Empty Bottles, Broken Bones* is available now on all good streaming services.

- ***www.facebook.com/wolfesunday***
- ***www.wolfesunday.bandcamp.com***

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COOL CATS SQUEEZE HEAD INDOORS

After spending their summer outdoors at various festivals, the pop behemoth Squeeze, headed by former LAS attendees and *Acoustic* cover stars, Chris Difford and Glenn Tillbrook, will head indoors for three headline UK shows. The band will be playing a selection of their greatest hits from their 14-album-strong career, as well as select cuts from their critically acclaimed latest LP *Cradle To Grave*.

Tues 6 September	Warrington, Parr Hall
Wed 7 September	Northampton, Derngate
Thu 8 September	Hull, City Hall

Find tickets at ***http://gigst.rs/Squeeze***

BARN ON THE FARM FESTIVAL

The current darling of the music press and BBC Sound of 2016 winner Jack Garratt and alt-pop duo Oh Wonder are the first headliners to be announced for this year's Barn on the Farm Festival.

Also appearing are Honne, Gavin James, Rationale, Zak Abel, JP Cooper, Billie Marten, Frances, Samm Henshaw, Flyte, Clean Cut Kid and the Hunna.

The festival, which has previously played host to *Acoustic* favourites James Bay, Ed Sheeran and Ben Howard, has developed a reputation for championing up-and-coming artists, so it will be no surprise to see many of the acts performing picking up gongs at future award ceremonies.

For tickets and for future line-up announcements head to: ***www.barnonthefarm.co.uk***

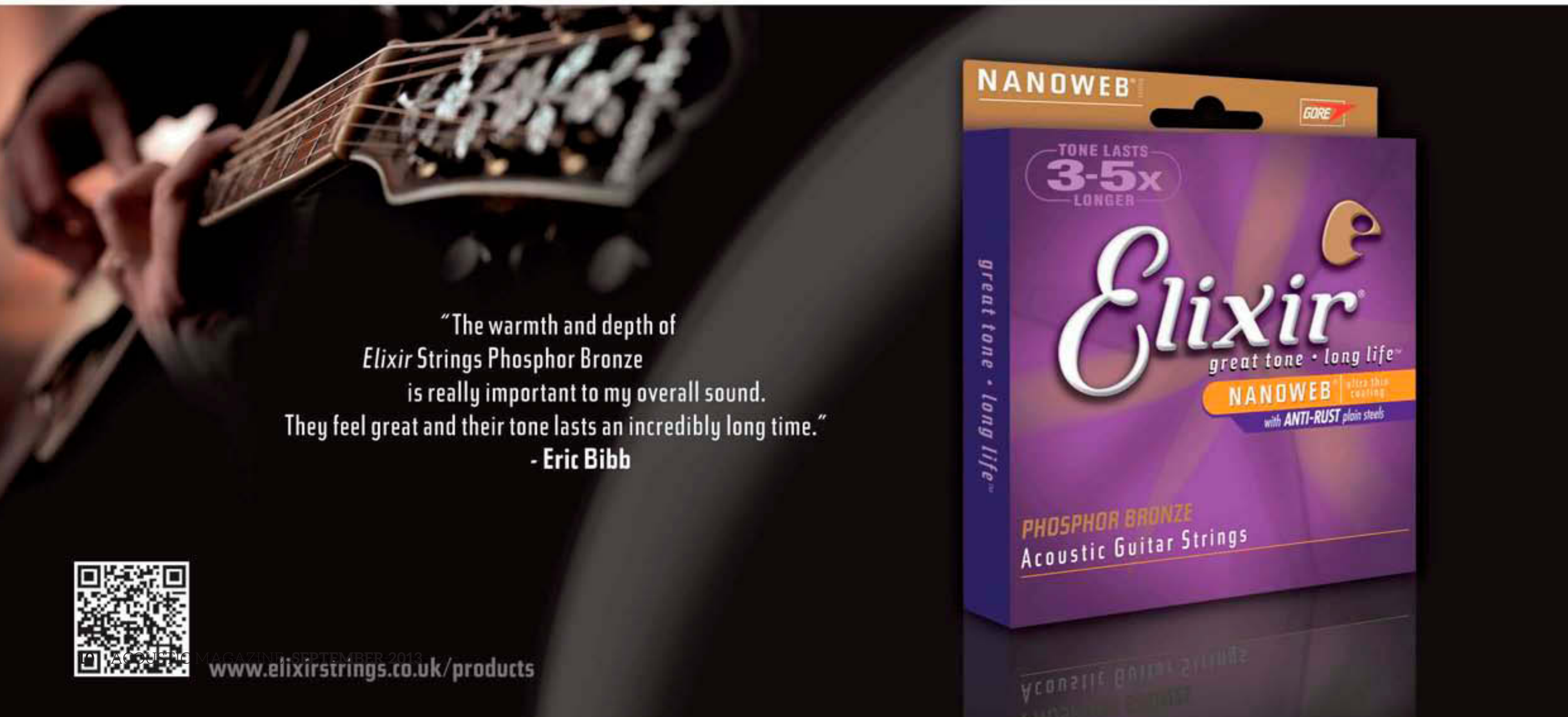
SATISFY YOUR STRING CURIOSITY WITH GHS

GHS Strings has released an unparalleled amount of information about its range of strings on its website.

The free tension guides include details on how to calculate tensions, frequency charts, as well as other things to consider such as winding techniques, string materials and string geometry. This information will allow you to go beyond standard settings and create a custom set of strings that perfectly suit your sound.

GHS tells us: "This extensive list gives string tensions for all current GHS acoustic strings, including singles and sets. The formulas used are industry standards and can be used to approximate other string tensions. The presentation of the charts also makes them ideal for guitarists who prefer to use altered or down tunings because they are designed to facilitate an easy choice of the perfect string set for their desired application."

If that sounds like it's up your street pop over to ***www.ghsstrings.com***



NYLECTRIC BRIDGES THE GAP

We're not entirely sure how to classify this one, but Cort has introduced a new nylon-string acoustic-inspired electric guitar called the Sunset Nylectric. Cort says that it aims to bridge the gap between classical players and electric players by "merging classical guitar features with a low-profile, more traditional electric instrument body style."

It sports a spruce top on a chambered mahogany single-cutaway body, a Fishman preamp, with volume, treble, and bass controls, a mahogany bolt-on neck, finished with a rosewood fretboard and classical tuners, highlighted by black binding and a comfortable 45mm width at the nut.

Is it an electric guitar? Probably. Is it an acoustic guitar? Possibly. Do we want to play it? Definitely.

www.cortguitars.com

IMAGINE THAT

C.F. Martin & Co will use Musikmesse to show off a raft of new acoustic models, including a second commemorative John Lennon guitar.

The D-28 John Lennon features Lennon's famous self-portrait illustration on the rosewood headplate, along with a beautiful mother-of-pearl, John Lennon themed design inlaid on the ebony fingerboard.

Also taking their maiden trip from Nazareth, PA to Frankfurt are the 0X Uke Bamboo – a unique soprano ukulele crafted from bamboo patterned high-pressure laminate – and three new models in the company's X series featuring macassar: DCX1AE Macassar, DX2AE Macassar and GPCX2AE Macassar.

The new X series models feature either Sitka or sapele tops, HPL macassar patterned back and sides and Fishman Sonitone electronics.

www.martinguitar.com

STUART RYAN DROPS THE HERITAGE

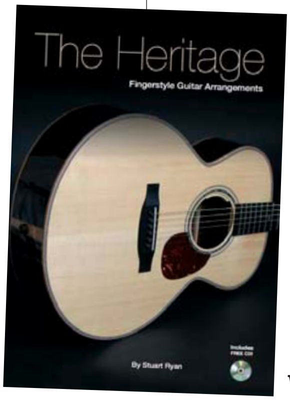
The award-winning guitarist Stuart Ryan has released his new book/CD of fingerstyle arrangements *The Heritage*.

Stuart has included songs that span a range of genres and musical inspiration, from traditional Irish tunes to New Orleans funeral ballads, gospel blues and American spirituals.

Each arrangement is presented in tablature and notation and includes detailed performance notes, fingering suggestions and an audio recording on the accompanying CD.

It's available from

www.stuartryanmusic.com



GIRLS ROCK LONDON

The Girls Rock Camp Alliance will hold two Girls Rock Camps in London in May and August 2016. Falling under the banner of Girls Rock London!, a not-for-profit organisation, the two camps will be held at the Blue Studios, Dalston where participants (who do not require any previous musical experience) will learn the basics of an instrument, form bands, and write and perform a song. They will be encouraged to write and play all kinds of contemporary music with the aim of inspiring girls and women to rock in whatever way they want.

The first camp will take place from Friday 27 to Monday 30 May 2016, and profits from this will go towards providing free places to the summer camp for girls. The summer camp will take place from Monday 1 to Saturday 6 August 2016 for girls aged 11 to 16.

For more information:

www.girlsrocklondon.com

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A FENDER PARAMOUNT PARLOUR DELUXE

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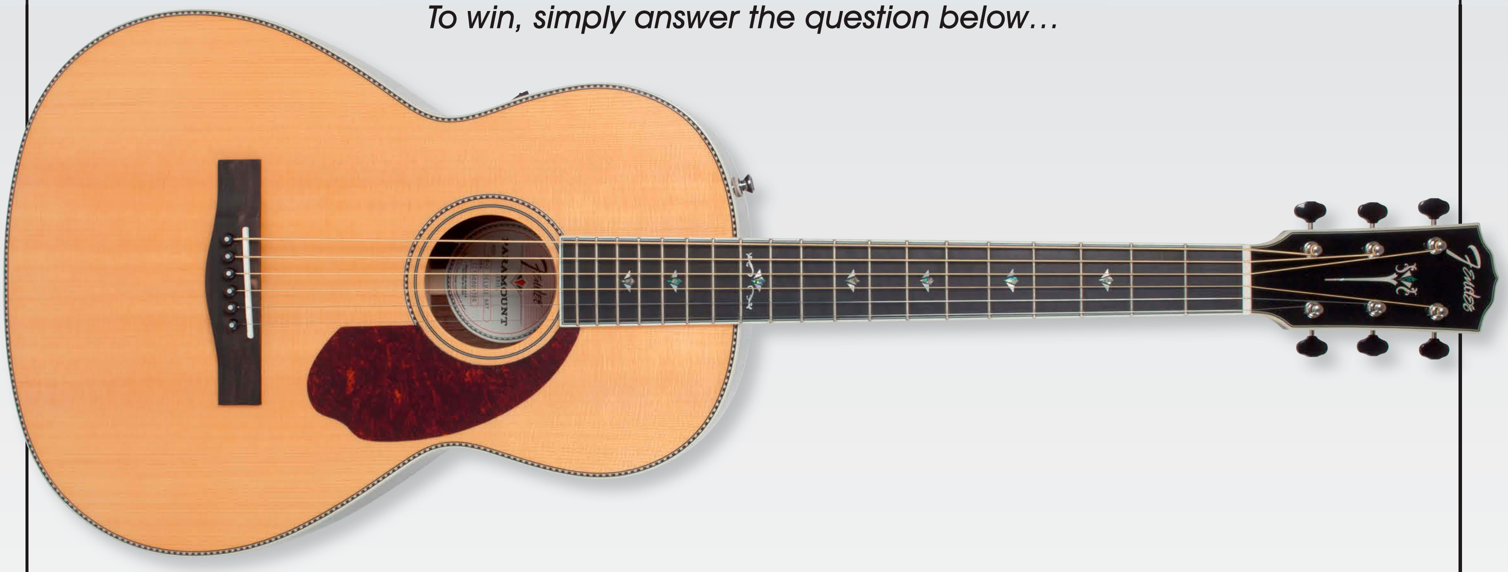
In the market for an all-solid parlour guitar? Well you're in luck, because we're giving away a stunning Fender Paramount Parlour Deluxe to one lucky reader. Sporting a Sitka spruce top with East Indian rosewood back and sides, this little beauty from Fender's newest acoustic range proved a hit when it was reviewed in *Acoustic* 115.

To win, simply answer the question below…



The Fender Paramount Parlour Deluxe's neck joins the body at which fret?

A 12th **B** 15th **C** 9th

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EMAIL: Include 'Fender Paramount comp' in the subject field, making sure that you enter your answer, name, age, contact telephone number and address in the body of the email and send it over to acousticcomp@blazepublishing.co.uk

POST: Complete the form below, tear off and send FAO Acoustic Magazine / Fender Paramount comp to Blaze Publishing, Lawrence House, Morrell Street, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 5SZ. Closing date for the competition is 23 May 2016. The winner will be announced shortly afterwards.

*Required details to enter the competition

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Please tick if you do not want to hear from Acoustic Magazine or the London Acoustic Show ☐

*Competition entries must arrive no later than the closing date specified. Only the winner will be contacted. One entry per household. Image(s) of winner may be used for future editorial or advertising purposes. The winner will be selected at random from all the correct entries. No cash alternative is offered. *Acoustic* magazine reserves the right to substitute the prize for an alternative of equal or greater value.

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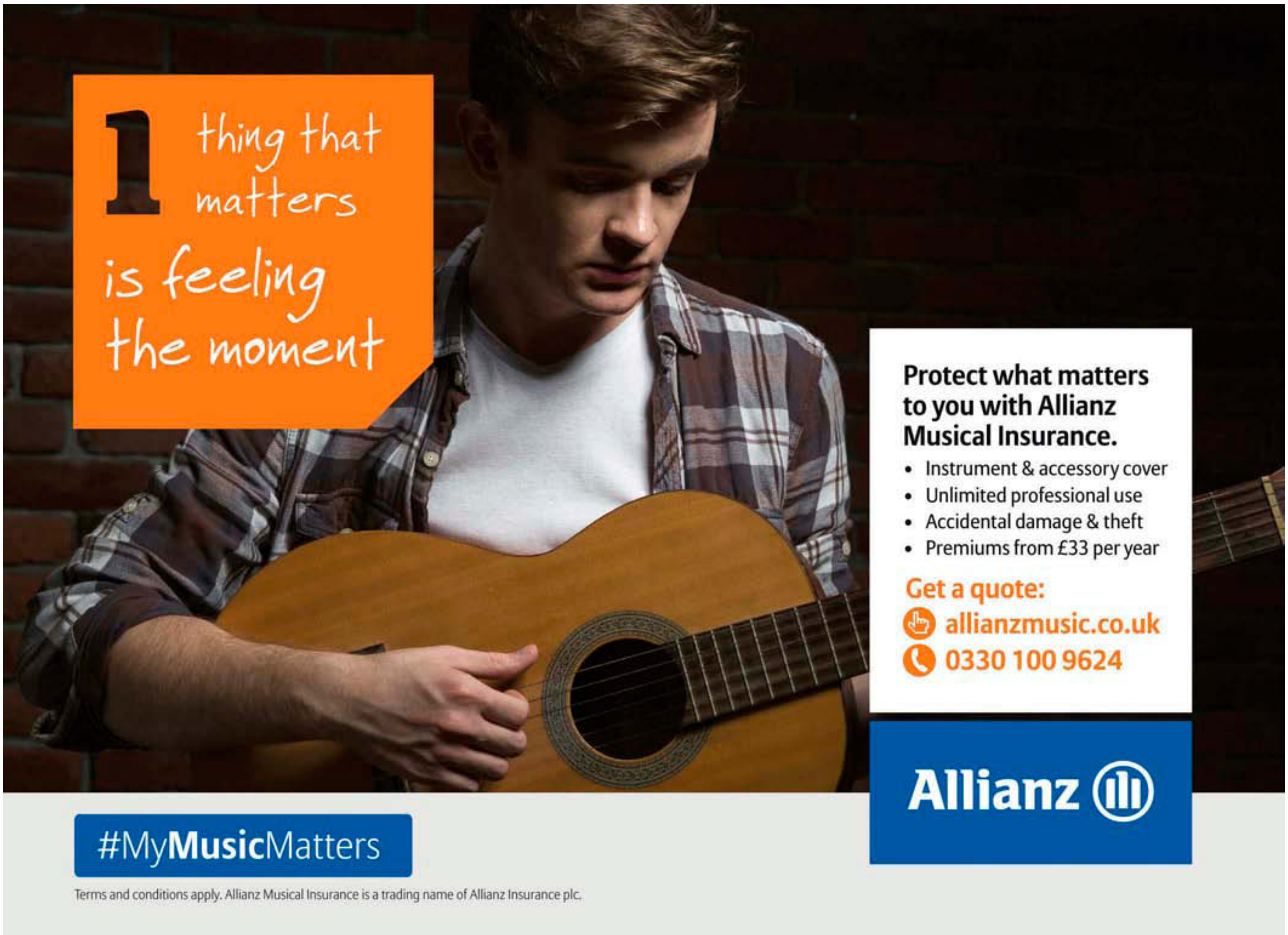
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ASK THE EXPERTS

YOU'VE GOT THE GIG, NOW WHAT ABOUT THE DIGS, PONDERS THE MU?

Booking reasonably priced, convenient and safe accommodation for after a show – be it a one-nighter in a far-flung town or part of a longer run – is a perennial worry. Working a long way from friends and family requires a special resilience, and ending up in sub-standard accommodation run by indifferent owners can turn even the dream engagement into a living nightmare. But it doesn't have to be like that.

THE DIGS LIST

Need to find a place to stay? Your first port of call is the venue's digs list – its catalogue of approved flats, rooms, bed and breakfasts and hotels.

If you're staying in someone's house, it is important to establish ground rules early on. You should ask about details such as when the owner wants to be paid, access, spare keys, and let them know the times of day or night you are likely to be working. Musicians on long engagements also need to discuss how and when friends and family are able to visit.

Demand for good digs often outstrips supply. Book early if you can. If you can't get something off the list then you will have time to look elsewhere.

If a venue doesn't have a list, it's not the end of the world. Specialist websites for theatrical digs and social media communities dedicated to finding accommodation can help you out.

TRY SHARING

If you're going with a group, you may find renting a house a better option. "We realised we could rent a house for a week and that worked out cheaper and better," says Jamie Pullman, MU regional officer for East & South East England.

"Good digs probably don't make an enormous amount of difference to your performance, but they do make an enormous amount of difference to your wellbeing and quality of life. It can be a wholly miserable experience sitting in a B&B all day. That's why renting a house is so much better. It gives you a much more homely feel."

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The nearer you are to your venue, the better. If you are forced to stay further out, think about how you are going to get to the venue and back. Are you driving or car sharing? In which case where can you park? Is there public transport? And how long will it take?

Security is another concern when booking somewhere to stay. The lack of affordable accommodation close to venues can mean long walks late at night after a performance. It's always advisable to find somewhere as close as possible to the venue, and arrange to walk back with others if you can.

SURVIVING ON A PITTANCE

When booking, talk to the accommodation provider and be direct with them. See if you can get a discount rate. There's no harm in asking, and they more likely to offer preferential rates to people with whom they have had direct contact.

You may have to pay in advance, at least a deposit. It's a big ask for musicians on increasingly tight budgets – whether that's an allowance or coming out of your own pocket – and you need to take that into account organising your tour or trip.

GET IN TOUCH

We are working to take some of the guesswork out of life on the road. Have you worked at a venue with a really good digs list? Let us know via **www.theMU.org/contact**. And if you have any questions about touring, travelling with instruments or any other aspect of your work as a musician, get in touch. ■

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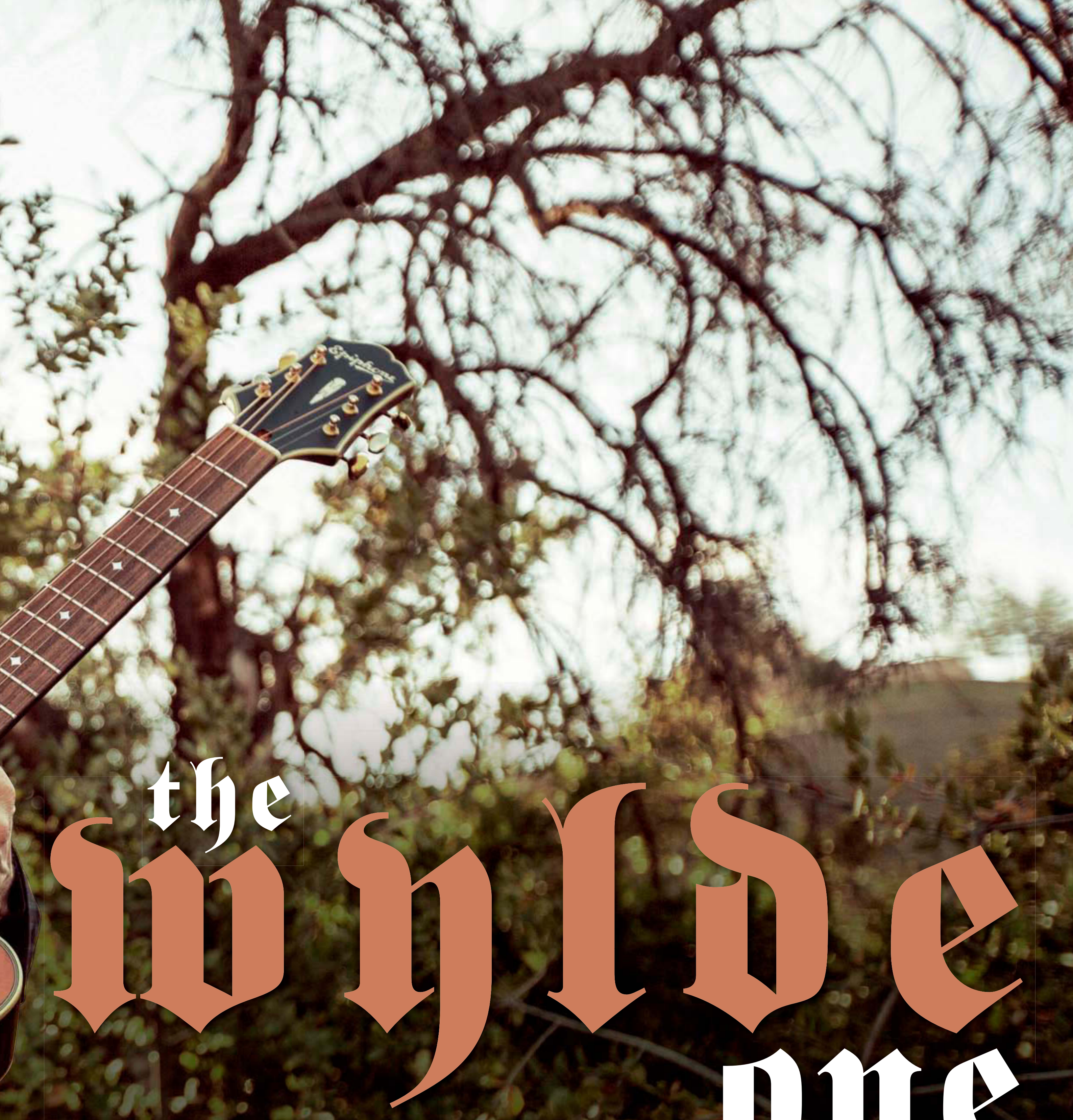

the wylde one

Black Label Society frontman Zakk Wylde, sometime Ozzy Osbourne guitarist and living legend, returns with an acoustic album – and his own guitar company, reports Joel McIver

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER **IMAGES:** JUSTIN REICH

Heavy metal and the acoustic guitar don't cross paths very often, apart from the occasional MTV power ballad delivered with a fan blowing through the player's lustrous mane and spotlights glinting off his spandex – but sometimes, just sometimes, the two work in combination. Zakk Wylde of Black Label Society, a band which is both 'heavy' and 'metal' in much the same way that the surface of the sun is a bit warm, is one of the few guitarists of the headbanging persuasion who can pull this acoustic trick off. Just see his new album, *Book Of Shadows II*, for confirmation.

"It's been 20 years since the first *Book Of Shadows* album," sniggers Wylde, an intimidating but affable chap largely made up of beard and muscles, "and so my whole thing was that *Chinese Democracy* took Guns N' Roses 15 years to make. I figured 'Let's see if we can beat 15 years and go 20!' Once we got to the 20-year mark I said 'We can go make the record now'..."

Demand has been high for a follow-up to the original acoustic album, recorded in 1996 during a break from Wylde's day job with Ozzy Osbourne, the rock icon in whose band he played a key role from 1987 to 1995 and again from 2001 to 2009.

"It's been pretty crazy," says the great man, "because all the years that we've been touring since the first album came out, all the Black Label chapters – whether it's in London, Boston, or Canada or South America or wherever – have been asking me, 'Dude, are you ever gonna get around to making another one of those Book Of Shadows records?' and I'd be like, 'Well, in between cleaning the dog run, changing diapers, ensuring world peace and all that other stuff I have to do, maybe we can fit one of those albums in before brunch.'"

It's been worth the wait. *Book Of Shadows II* is a subtle, nuanced set of tunes, on which Wylde plays the rhythm tracks on acoustic guitar, plays solos on electric and adds orchestration too. The opening song, 'Autumn Changes', is a genuine earworm: hear it once and you'll be humming all day. He chuckles when I tell him this, explaining: "To me, songs always have to have some depth and weight to them. As long as you're living and breathing, new bullshit happens in your life, and you can always write about it in a song. Lyrics either come from that, or something that's happened to me, or to friends, or something that I read about in someone's autobiography or something."

Wylde is dismissive of the effort that went into the album, perhaps because he's been so prolific across his career so far (eight live and studio albums with Ozzy, no fewer than 13 with Black Label Society, two solo albums and God knows how many DVDs, compilations and guest appearances along the way) and so he finds songwriting easy. But there's a lot of songwriting, arranging and performing skill in these songs, a good example being 'The King', where Wylde arranged a string ensemble for keyboards.

"The way I do the strings on my Korg," he explains, "is I just write out the cello parts, then I add the viola bit and then I do the violins: they all have their own space. It's just like writing charts. It's a lot of fun. I love the whole process. I tried using real string musicians on our *Unblackened* album (2013) but it was a total disaster. The string players didn't have any

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Mike Dawes debuts stunning new independent single in aid of Unicef and FAB Projects

@mike_dawes /mikedawesofficial /mikedawesofficial @mikedawesmusic

Airport based instrumentalist and Justin Hayward collaborator Mike Dawes recently unveiled 'Scarlet', a soulful take on the blistering Periphery track of the same name.

100% of all proceeds from sales of the digital single (available as 'pay what you want', including free) will be donated evenly between Unicef UK and FAB Projects, an independent charity based in Kenya.

Fans can download the track and view the music video at www.mikedawes.com

Mike will be returning to the UK this Autumn with headline shows in Liverpool and the Isle of Man, plus a full tour in support of the legendary Moody Blues frontman, Justin Hayward.

September
3 - Jacaranda Club - Liverpool (including free workshop)
9 - Hall for Cornwall - Truro
10 - Regent Centre - Christchurch
11 - St David's Hall - Cardiff
13 - Southend Cliffs Pavillion - Westcliff on Sea
14 - Chatham Central Theatre - Kent
16 - Stevenage Arts Centre - Stevenage
17 - G Live - Guildford
18 - Floral Pavillion - New Brighton
20 - Alban Arena - St Albans
21 - The Sage - Gateshead
22 - Perth Concert Hall - Perth
24 - Wolverhampton Grand Theatre - Wolverhampton
25 - Shanklin Theatre - Isle Of Wight
October 28 - IOM Guitar Fest - Isle of Man

ERNIE BALL DiMarzio

Black Label Society

sheet music, and they were like 'What do we do here? It doesn't say how many bars we play for' and I said 'We improvise. The jam might be four minutes long, it might be eight minutes long. Just keep playing the same thing.'

"They said 'We don't understand' and I said 'Just keep playing A minor, G and F!' and they said 'We still don't understand. How many times do we play it?' and I said 'Just keep playing it until we look at you!' It was a fuckin' nightmare so, in the end we got Derek Sherinian, who used to be in Dream Theater, to do it on a keyboard."

And so to the acoustic guitars, and specifically to the recent news in Wylde's world that he has recently launched an MI company, Wylde Audio, which is about to start manufacturing acoustic and electric guitars as well as amps and accessories, branded with the Wylde name – some of which will presumably be featuring his trademark bullseye artwork.

"On the new record I used Wylde Audio acoustic prototypes," he tells us. "For me, acoustics are all about playing like an electric guitar, in terms of the action, which my Wylde Audio acoustics will. When you start off on an acoustic, depending on how bowed the neck is, the action is okay as long as you're playing a G, a D and an A minor chord. As soon as you start getting past the fifth fret, the action is eight feet off the neck! So my guitars have an action which is awesomely comfortable to play. It literally plays like an electric. Right now they're tweaking the final designs: they'll probably be out later this year, and definitely in time for Winter NAMM 2017."

So what materials is Wylde going to be using for the new guitars, we ask? "I use ass-kicking, proven woods that sound great. We're not talking about rocket science. It's cool to use flame tops and other beautiful woods on the tops and the sides and the back, because those things are eye candy, but it's all about using proven materials and focusing on playability. Maple, ebony and rosewood fretboards all sound amazing, and then you've got mahogany and maple and ebony for the bodies. You've got spalted maple and birdseye maple for the tops… the sky's the limit, really."

Asked who the luthiers are behind the new guitars, Wylde replies: "It's just a bunch of buds that I know. If you surround yourself with great guys, the rest will take care of itself. It's like anything else: if me and you are going to start a restaurant, we get great chefs who know the restaurant business and off we go, with me and you making the final decisions on what happens, and that's that. Obviously we'll have the high-end guitar models, but I'm trying to make sure there's a low-end one too, as long as the playability is good. You can definitely do one of these for $400, without a doubt."

He warms to his topic, clearly keen on the freedom that being a business owner provides to people with vision. "You know, you and me could be sitting drinking a coffee at a table and say, 'What kind of wood is this table?' because it's got an insane grain or a flame on it or whatever. Then we might say, 'Dude, let's see if we can get some of this wood for the tops of the acoustics!' That's the beauty of having our own company – we can do whatever we want. It's definitely cool to have my own guitar and amps, and we have our own strings too. Picks and pedals as well – the whole nine yards. I said the sky's the limit, but actually there is no limit, because it's limitless."

He's off on a sporting metaphor now. "To me," he enthuses, "it's no different than being a team owner. It's like David Beckham playing for Manchester United, then coaching the team and becoming the general manager and then the vice-president of operations. After that, the only logical next step for him is to be the team owner. At that point he's in charge of the drafts, the farm system, everything down to the way the field looks and the concessions. Not everybody wants to do that, but I enjoy the whole process. As soon as I wake up, my whole day consists of Black Label and what we're gonna be doing. I always tell younger musicians when they ask me for advice, 'Who wants to have a shitty job? Make your band your job.'

Wylde is quite a character in an industry that doesn't have as many of those as it used to – and we haven't even touched on the literally hundreds of gobsmacking anecdotes that have made him a favourite of rock magazines for decades. For one thing, he was a prodigious drinker until a brush with the Grim Reaper in the form of a blood clot behind one of his kneecaps – fortunately, caught by doctors before it could do any harm – caused him to put the bottle down for good.

"I wake up every day and I check that I'm breathing, that's number one!" he laughs, perhaps with that little incident in mind. "After that, I'll make some java and get started. I'm always playing guitar, and I hit the iron for a while. I wouldn't change my situation for anything, I'm blessed."

Last time *Acoustic* interviewed Wylde, we asked him what the most important things in his life were. His answer was gold. He said, and we quote exactly, "I have to keep things real simple. I play guitar, lift weights, drink beer and have massive sex with my wife."

We remind him of this and he guffaws, replying: "I still use that exact same format, but now I've got a guitar company I've replaced the booze with glue and paint chips!" ■

***The Book Of Shadows II* is out now on Entertainment One Music. Info: www.zakkwylde.com, www.blacklabelsociety.com**

CALLAGHAN

Georgina Callaghan returns to the country of her birth to share her new album. But any notion of 'the difficult second album' has been dispelled by the story telling potential found in her adopted American home

WORDS: MORGAN MATTHEWS **IMAGES:** PAUL CLAMPIN

Georgina Callaghan, who performs under her surname, is a Lincolnshire born singer-songwriter, now living in Nashville. At least that's where she currently calls home. It seems her schedule keeps her nomadic for much of the year, and the UK release of her new *A History of Now* LP isn't going to ease things up any time soon.

When Callaghan sent artist and producer Shawn Mullins some songs to listen to, it was the start of an epic adventure. "I had grown up listening to Shawn," she says, "so when he replied to my contact and invited me to America to work on an album, I just thought I'd give it a go, and I've been there six years."

The big land is an easy one to find you exploring and touring without exhausting it. "It's an amazing place," she says. "You can just get lost out there, it's so enormous. I've toured from one side of the country to the other, but it still blows my mind that you can drive for 10 hours and still be in the same place."

It's a different landscape now for the time being for Callaghan, who finds herself on home soil for a UK tour. "I try to split my time now between the US and the UK," she explains. "I've been doing some gigs over here for about the last year. I wasn't even sure I would tour here again after moving, but last year I did a little showcase in London, and the album got such a great reaction that I thought I should start coming back a bit more. It's been a crazy and unexpected year, actually," she continues. "I can't believe just how well things are going over here now."

The album in question is *A History Of Now*, a 12-track LP recorded in Nashville by Dennis Matosky. "It's always interesting when you start a new project. I think it's quite different from *Life In Full Colour*. It's strange," she says, "because you have so long to write that first album, it can be songs that you've had for years that you put together into a set. With the second one, the writing time is so much shorter, and I'd had all the experiences of being out in this new country, meeting new people and I think a lot of that went onto this album, so I really love it."

The writing of a second album is an interesting one, as often much of it is done on the road. This can sometimes have a negative effect on one artist, while allowing another to thrive. I wonder how Callaghan used the pressures to create. "As a songwriter," she replies, "one the things I love the most is listening to other people's experiences, so

> **"I think you go through your career experimenting somewhat, until you find where you are comfortable"**

after my shows I always go out and meet the audience and chat with them, and so many of them share stories and connect my songs to something they have experienced in their own life. You get to hear some really interesting stories and it always amazes me. The strength and resolve you hear from people is inspiring and there were several songs on the album that were inspired by that story-telling. Conversely, songs like 'Crazy Beautiful Life' and 'We Don't Have To Change The World' are songs about the moments when you stand and think, 'Oh my god how did I get here? It's too good to be true!' Those moments when you want to take it all in, enjoy life and not worry about anything else."

It comes across as a focused and assured set of songs that convey a range of messages throughout their hooky, sunny arrangements. "I suppose with *Life In Full Colour* I was experimenting more," she explains, "so there were more varying styles there, but on *A History Of Now* it is steadier. I think you go through your career experimenting somewhat, until you find where you are comfortable, but also, the two producers are very different. The first one had Shawn on there, who is very much an Americana country guy, whereas Dennis has spent much of his career in LA, where he has had a strong pop background alongside big country productions, so I think it really makes for a different style of sound. I really enjoyed this recording – it was so quick, just three or four days in the House of Blues studio in Nashville. We had all of the musicians in there, working on the songs, so it was almost live, with everyone playing at the same time and I really liked that. There was a real buzz and the songs came together really well." She stops a moment and laughs. "But I did give myself a few years to write it, so it wasn't that fast a record!"

Although many musicians in a room at once can hint at a full blown sound, Callaghan is sure of her priorities. "I definitely wanted the vocals at the heart of the album," she says, "and for nothing to really take over from that. Ultimately I want the recordings to sound similar to when we play live and to feel real. I want to hear individual instruments and I wanted that warm sound, which is why we recorded a lot of this one to tape – it really gives it that warmth.

"They were such amazing musicians," she continues, "and it was really something seeing what they could immediately bring to a song. I'd go in with a vocal and piano piece written, and the guitarist would come in with a line and

then the drummer would try something and it just changed the whole shape of the song. It was a magical experience being in there with such talented players."

As she knows, bringing that studio sound on the road is a different task, but the singer has a tidy set-up planned for this tour. "I won't be playing it alone. There will be a few of the guys joining me: my cellist is flying in from Atlanta, we'll have Pete Rinaldi on guitar and Adam Wakeman on keyboards, so it'll be a combination of one or some of them in all of the shows. I like to bring at least one musician on stage with me now – it's more fun, but I think it also brings a lot more to the show. I want to give the crowd a big experience and take them through a range of emotions, so anything to up that atmosphere is really good."

She is adamant about the power of the live show, especially in these modern times. "I still believe in the old way of doing things, you know, getting out there and touring. It's the oldest form of social media," she says. "You get a room full of people and give them something to take with them to tell another person to see. Putting on a live performance is something you can't copy and it doesn't come for free – people still have to come and take an hour and a half of their time to see a show. It's hard for them to feel engaged these days. And although the mobile phone at gigs recording and sharing doesn't worry me, I do think people need to switch off sometimes, and I think if you're an artist who can engage that audience and provide a good live act, you'll be alright, because I don't think that's going to go away."

For her own work on tour, Callaghan is fortunate enough to have some beautiful acoustics close at hand, with Gibson lending her their iconic jumbo spruce and mahogany J-100, cousin of the maple J-200, when in the UK. "I'm totally in love with them," she says. "It's a real treat to go to the showroom and pick up such a beautiful instrument, and it's much easier not travelling with a guitar."

It's an enviable circumstance and a great perk, not having to do any post-flight adjustments. "It does make sound checks quite stress-free," she agrees. "I'm fairly fussy about sound after all these years and give the tech quite specific instructions, but usually it's just me and one or two others, so it makes it easy. I just have my own guitar and microphone – I use a Neumann KMS 105, which is an amazing mic, and now I have one of those I can't sing with anything else."

Other than the top end gear at her disposal, Callaghan's dearest instrument is a humble offering from a most reliable and ubiquitous brand. "I still have my first guitar, which my dad bought me from Denmark Street," she says. "It's a Tanglewood and it has a much smaller body than the Gibson, more like a small Martin. That one will always have the sentimental value. Unfortunately it's taken a battering over the years, so it's currently residing at the guitar hospital over in Nashville." ■

Acoustic Coffee House is out 1 June. Callaghan is touring the UK throughout June and July, starting with Under The Apple Tree Festival. ***www.callaghansongs.com***

DONOVAN

Stephen Bennett speaks to the all-too-quickly-pigeon-holed acoustic troubadour Donovan about acoustic guitars, a lost J-45 and a song about cake

WORDS: STEPHEN BENNETT **IMAGES:** PLANET EARTH PUBLICITY

In our endless reappraisal of the musical legacy of the 60s, through all the lava-lamp, psychedelic hemp-smoke haze, we've somehow managed to blur the Breughel-busy picture of that madcap, Carnaby-coloured landscape to such an extent that artists of genuine global influence – especially those who survived – find their essential contribution (if not their sack-loads of iconic, era-defining tunes) taken for granted as just another ephemeral drop in the countercultural ocean. This is how Donovan – innovator, alchemist and all-round genre-juggler – gets lumped into the big, beige bag labelled 'folkie'.

Yes, we're talking pop-chart 'flower power' and the fond, ever out-of-reach idyll of acoustic hippie-dom here, but away from the 'hits' – and there are plenty – a consecutive trio of less-familiar songs from the recent *Retrospective* collection ('Get Thy Bearings', 'Turquoise' and 'Sunny Goodge Street') forms a mini-'Astral Weeks' that lays the pastoral-jazz ground for Van Morrison's own mystic meisterwork-to-come, while the doom-laden, swooping cinematics of 'Hampstead Incident' contain enough of a dramatic spark to have ignited half of Jeff Buckley's entire recorded output.

The Glasgow-born, art-school beatnik who lights up the soundtrack to what was, arguably, pop's most diverse and frantically creative decade turns 70 in May and he's having a bit of a 'do' to mark the occasion. At the Palladium, no less, where his old mate John Lennon famously incited the well-heeled groovers to rattle their jewellery.

Reassuringly, though, Donovan's still the troubadour-knight of Old Bohemia he's always been – and he still loves a good story. And so… to St. Ives in Cornwall, circa 1964, where a generation of artists strives to capture that gloriously unique light amid flocks of scruffy student-poets desperate to inhale the recycled oxygen of creativity and where Donovan's busking for the early evening fish and chip crowd on the gently sloping arena of the harbour slipway.

"Those two summers, '63 and '64, Gypsy Dave [Donovan's inseparable sidekick] and I used to hang out in St. Ives with our friends and play. It's funny because people still ask, 'Who was Saffron?' [as per the timeless, 'Mellow Yellow'] and we'd always laugh about that. Gypsy used to say, 'One day you're going to have to tell them.' The truth is, when we were sleeping rough in the woods above the beach – we'd be around 17, hitch-hiking, no money to speak of – we'd go down to the bakery and ask the lady there if she had any of yesterday's bread left over. Instead of that, she took pity on these wee wandering boys and she'd give us proper fresh cakes; the yellow ones they made specially – with saffron. From there it turned into a girl's name, a Buddhist monk's robes… all kinds of things to different people. Essentially, it's a song about a cake."

"Bert Jansch's kitchen was a big gathering place for musicians back then. He was a magnanimous teacher, too"

Thus are the great lyrics semi-accidentally forged. "I did 33 cities in Britain last year and finished in St. Ives. It was nice to walk along the sea-front again and re-capture some of those old days." We'll return to Cornwall later.

Meanwhile, there's plenty going on in 2016. "I have a lovely little studio here as part of my house in Majorca and we've been recording songs for the new album – provisionally entitled, *Lunarian* – that looks like it should be out in the late summer, early autumn. I've been on this 50th anniversary tour thing since the middle of 2015 and it's kind of stretched a bit. Last year was pretty much all UK dates but now – just to say thanks to all the fans, really – I'm moving on to Germany, then to Paris in June and on to North America in September and October."

He'll be accompanied by a familiar acoustic companion – almost an extra limb throughout those 50 years: a cherry-sunburst Gibson J-45. It seems a few earlier, lesser contenders (not all of them guitar-shaped) fell by the wayside. "I'd originally wanted to be a drummer but it turned out that one of my best friends at school, Mick Sharman, had a girlfriend who owned a Zenith – one of the f-hole ones the old blues singers used to have – similar to Paul McCartney's in the skiffle-band pictures. Mick asked me if I wanted to borrow it and I'm afraid his girlfriend never got it back. I'd seen J-45s, though, and finally bought one in 1965 in Hollywood for $300. All my recordings from late that year, all the way through to '69 (when it was stolen), were made with that guitar. It had the silk-and-steel strings that Joan Baez had turned me on to – La Bella – kind of soft, like on a classical, but I like them because they've still got that metal ring. I'd had the action taken down to nothing so that it was almost buzzing but I liked that sound. I was touring – I only remember it being a university town somewhere in America – and some guy just walked into the dressing rooms and out with the J-45. I'd never looked after it, in that sense, and there was never any real security back then but still… I just hope it'll come back one day."

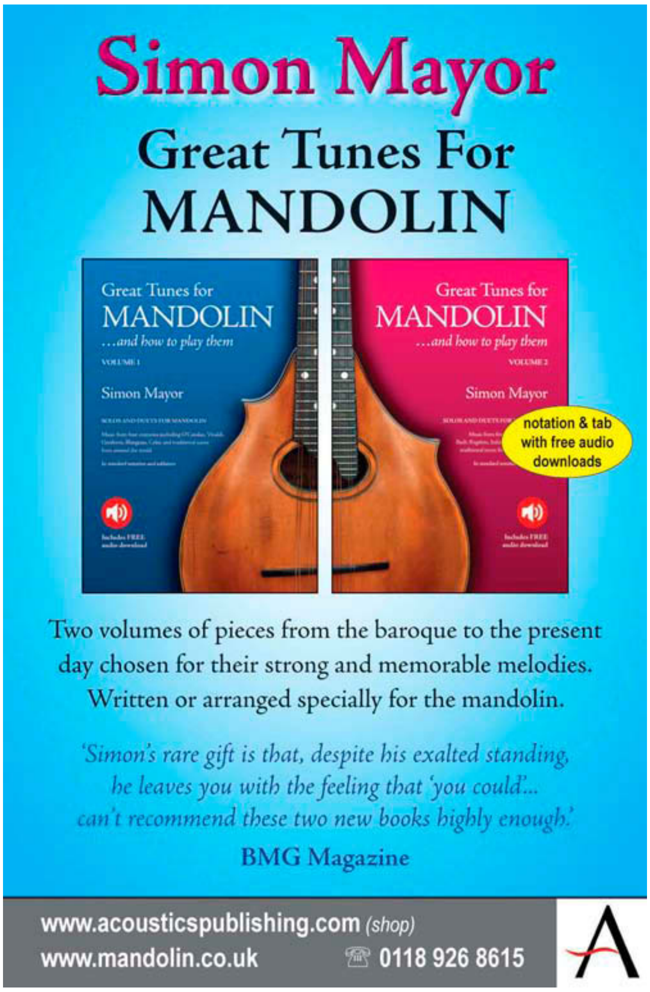
When Gibson heard the guitar had gone, they offered to make Donovan a signature replica of the original. Sort of. "They told me they wanted

to make it deeper and louder – and a little bit wider in the neck. I said no, if you're going to do it, you keep it as it was. But then I picked up a similar J-45, same year as mine – I put the La Bella strings on it – and I realised what I'd been missing. All those sounds from all those recordings came right back. And I did notice, even though I've got big hands, just how slim the neck was at the nut. They were right, so I agreed to them making it slightly wider. Apart from that, everything else is in line with the original."

Donovan's taken with the notion of the J-45 as a guitar made, as he puts it, "For the working man…something you could throw in the back of a truck. Woody Guthrie had a Gibson." It clearly fed straight into the Bohemian mystique that so captivated his gently rebellious young nature. Nonetheless, "I've got 13 guitars now, I think. Gibsons, a Martin, four Zemaitis (including the "moon guitar" he's often been pictured with), three by Danny Ferrington, a beautiful 1966 Condé Hermanas classical… Eddie, the handyman in our house in Ireland, says, 'why d'you have so many… you can't play them all?' I tell him Jimmy Page has got 300."

Before his Scots-Irish family moved down to Hatfield from Glasgow in 1955, the only musician in the house had been Donovan's Uncle Bill, occasional purveyor of the odd cowboy song or Bing Crosby hit on an old acoustic. All the rest sang a cappella. "You'd sing standing on a chair in the middle of the room. There were no instruments in my immediate family background, but in school we hadrecorders and tambourines. I was listening to the drums on my dad's jazz records – Gene Krupa *Live at Carnegie Hall* – trying to copy the solos so when I switched to guitar it turned out I was already a great rhythm player! All those contrapuntal and syncopated things just seemed to come naturally."

Donovan's dad's contribution to his songwriting education came, on those same 'a cappella' evenings, in the form of traditional ballad poetry. There's hardly any style of music today that doesn't owe a huge debt to the Gaelic tunes and lyrics that were carried over to America from the late 1700s on. Probably half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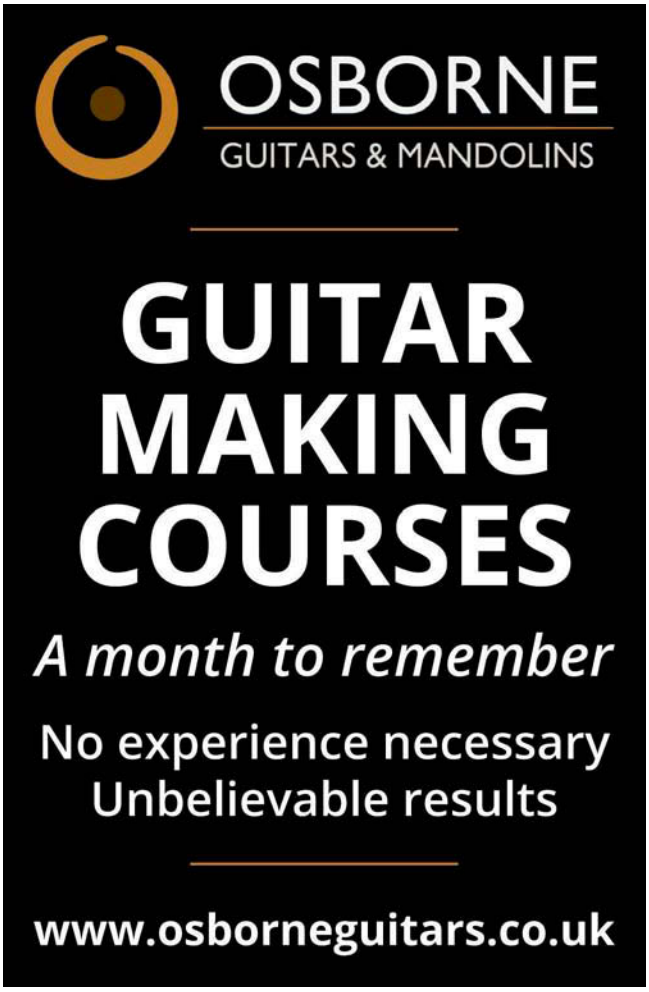
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the people entering the country back then were Irish and Scots, after all! Millions… all taking the fiddle and the ballad form with them.

For this aspiring balladeer, the guitar was a lot easier to travel with than his full Gretsch drum-outfit and, though he took to it from the off, Donovan has his own, rather more English, version of the Robert Johnson 'crossroads' epiphany. Not so much an encounter with the Devil himself as with the gifted but somewhat 'over-ripe' Dirty Hugh.

"I was bored silly in secondary school. We didn't do any music apart from miming to records – me, Mick (of the 'borrowed' Zenith) and Dippy (of 'Epistle' fame). I'd started going to folk clubs, mainly in St. Albans, with a guitar I'd swapped for a pair of boots in St. Ives. It had steel strings and classical wooden pegs. Impossible to tune. Anyway, I saw guys like Mick Softley there and Jack Elliott when he came over and they were all fingerpicking. I thought… how the hell do you do that? I'd go to the park on Sundays to play and one day along comes Dirty Hugh; a really handsome, bohemian guy in a long coat who stank to high heaven. Nobody would go near him but he had a Martin. I'd never even seen one before. He could play claw-hammer and said he'd only teach me if I brought him a bottle of wine in the graveyard the next day."

After three long days downwind from Dirty Hugh, Donovan had captured the style that would adorn a string of classic hits; not just his own but – in passing on what he'd learned in the graveyard (and later with John Renbourn, Bert Jansch and Davy Graham) – those of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and countless others in the burgeoning 60s rock scene, all influenced by Donovan's immediate, hands-on presence. As if the fact of having taught John Lennon to fingerpick wasn't legacy enough.

"Bert Jansch's kitchen was a big gathering place for musicians back then. He was a magnanimous teacher, too, unlike a lot of players around that time, who'd turn their hands away from you so as to keep hold of their little secrets."

The ominous, rolling A7 to D9 pattern he picked up from Jansch and fashioned into 'Season of the Witch' has been a cornerstone of rock guitar jamming ever since.

"John Renbourn said that when I broke into that riff in Bert's kitchen I played it for seven hours straight. That's all we did: play. Though we'd maybe move to the bedroom if the kitchen was full. The tune we all had to learn back then was 'Candy Man' by Reverend Gary Davis. That and 'St. James Infirmary' were the essentials. The modal thing that came later was down to the fact that we were all listening to Indian music and re-tuning our guitars. 'Colours' and 'Mellow Yellow' are both tuned down to D. The banjo player, Derroll Adams, was a big influence on me starting to discover four rather than six-string chords. The Edge from U2 still uses a lot of that style."

Indeed, these were the chord patterns and structures he'd go on to share with Lennon and McCartney, Graham Nash and a host of contemporary acoustic explorers. They'd also caught the ear of one or two luminaries in the electric world, as well as that legendary producer/arranger of a whole raft of pop greats, Mickie Most.

"We were already recording with musicians from classical and jazz backgrounds but when we added the likes of Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck and Allan Holdsworth to the mix we were opening an enormous number of doors, fusing all those things together – breaking the rules, really. They definitely picked up on it over at Abbey Road! John and Gypsy Dave would be up all night talking about that stuff."

"Please announce that the lost J-45 has just been found!"

So from wild times then to the pending 70th party in May and that new album.

"The title's another word I made up. A bit like *Barabajagal* and nobody could figure that one out, either. In many ways it's a return to that same modal, acoustic style I was playing back then, which led to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame [he was inducted in 2012] saying I'd 'single-handedly initiated the psychedelic revolution'. I didn't invent it but I was probably the first to open the door. As for the 70th birthday party, all these extra tour dates kept flooding in then, out of the blue, we were offered the Palladium and I just thought, right, let's do it! I'm going to revive the all-acoustic, 'Beat Café' idea from the 2004 album with [long-time collaborator and arranger] John Cameron, [bass legend] Danny Thompson and [Porcupine Tree, King Crimson alumnus] Gavin Harrison on drums. We'll have a little raised stage with posters of the Beat poets, little tables, a few of my drawings… tell a few stories and try and explore where all this music came from. And if they've still got it, I'll definitely be using that revolving stage!"

A story-packed hour has flown by but Donovan's still got one Palladium-related tale up his sleeve. "I was on the bill there with the Swinging Blue Jeans, maybe the Searchers… Cliff, perhaps? Anyway, I ended up being introduced to the Queen. She leaned in, very quiet, and said, 'We haven't seen you on television for a while.' She sounded a bit concerned by that and I thought 'I'm talking to my mum here.' I had this vision of the Queen watching *Top Of The Pops* and thinking, where's Donovan? Anyway, it'll be my wife, Linda, waving from the Royal Box this time."

Rightly so. A celebratory night at the London Palladium seems a long way, though hardly in distance, from Les Cousins folk-club where he first began to make his psychedelic mark on the songwriting world, but Donovan's eternally fresh (and ever-expanding) back-catalogue still delivers what one US film producer recently described as a trademark, "hopeful melancholy".

And speaking of hopeful… a post-script on that stolen J-45. Rumours recently began to surface along the lines of, 'someone somewhere in Europe knows something'. Donovan had taken off the original scratch-plate. He knew every mark on the instrument up until the time it vanished in 1969. He'd spot a fake a mile off.

So, shortly after speaking to *Acoustic* from Majorca, he sent this message (and the accompanying photograph) via e-mail: "Please announce that the lost J-45 has just been found! I have it in Ireland and I made a special little mark inside the guitar in 1965, which proves it's the one."

Great news and inspiration for a whole new creative chapter for the man himself, perhaps, while for one chip-eating eight-year old from that Cornish harbour-front – mesmerised by Donovan's first forays into troubadour legend and now picking up the story over fifty years on - it's definitely a happy ending.

"It's lovely to be able to do this with *Acoustic* magazine. After all, my best friend for over 50 years has been an acoustic guitar."

And while, among those anthems of hopeful melancholy, Donovan accepted long ago he'll never catch the wind, he's clearly still conjuring lyrical, closing lines with an easy generosity of spirit that's as free and alive now as it's ever been. ■

CAM PENNER

Cam Penner, the purveyor of unsettling, compelling and strangely beautiful music, reveals how following the path least travelled has influenced his songwriting

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER

He's quietly spoken, but with his stocky build and bushy black beard, on first sight Cam Penner's an intimidating presence. So it's no surprise that his music, at times, has a bit of an edge to it. On his last album, *To Build A Fire*, an unexpected blast of funereal horns starts one of the most original sonic excursions to come along in a long while. Penner's voice alternately howls or whispers against a backdrop of ukuleles, guitars and banjos, mixed with loops of electric guitar and just visceral noise.

But paradoxically the songs this bearded mountain man writes are often intensely fragile – songs so tender that when they transcend into aggressive storms of noise, as they occasionally do, it hits you like a brick. The end effect is unsettling, compelling and strangely beautiful. But Cam Penner's hardly a 'run of the mill' guy, so it should be no surprise that his approach to music making is equally offbeat. His last two albums with guitarist Jon Wood, an etiolated rake of a man who lays down washes of ambient guitar worthy of Brian Eno, were recorded in a homemade studio in the woods behind his house, constructed of trees he felled.

> **"I don't want to be bored with music, it's too great and such a powerful, mysterious force"**

"We get up, have a coffee, Jon goes to the studio right away with his coffee, and starts turning knobs and listening back. At noon we start playing, and we work until 2 in the morning and eat after. We love it. It's always 10 days; 10 days of no family, just great stuff. No idea's stupid. We try it all."

Cam lives just outside Nelson, a sleepy backwater nestling in the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia. Dubbed the 'pot capital' of Canada, it's a small city of 10,000 or so inhabitants, whose glory days occurred during the Toad Mountain gold and silver rush of the 1800s. During the Vietnam war, Nelson became home to draft dodgers, and it's still encourages people looking to escape the 21st century to hit the road and set up there. It's easy to imagine Cam fits in well.

He was raised in a Mennonite town in South Manitoba, where Cam's parents ran an illegal honky tonk in the backwoods. Cam remembers them bringing in fiddle bands and rock'n'roll bands to play, and presumably they didn't get on too well with their God-fearing neighbours.

"My parents weren't musical themselves, but they loved music. They bought me a guitar and other instruments, and I just took to it. I didn't have a lot of friends that played music, and so

the bar was always a good place for me to go, a place where I could sort things out and be creative. I grew up playing all the songs I liked to hear on the radio, and around 13 years old I started writing my own stuff. It was probably shit, but I've always tried to make a sound that's my own. You take what tools you have in the box, and you try to build your own way of approaching music."

When he was 19, he left home and began working in a Chicago homeless shelter.

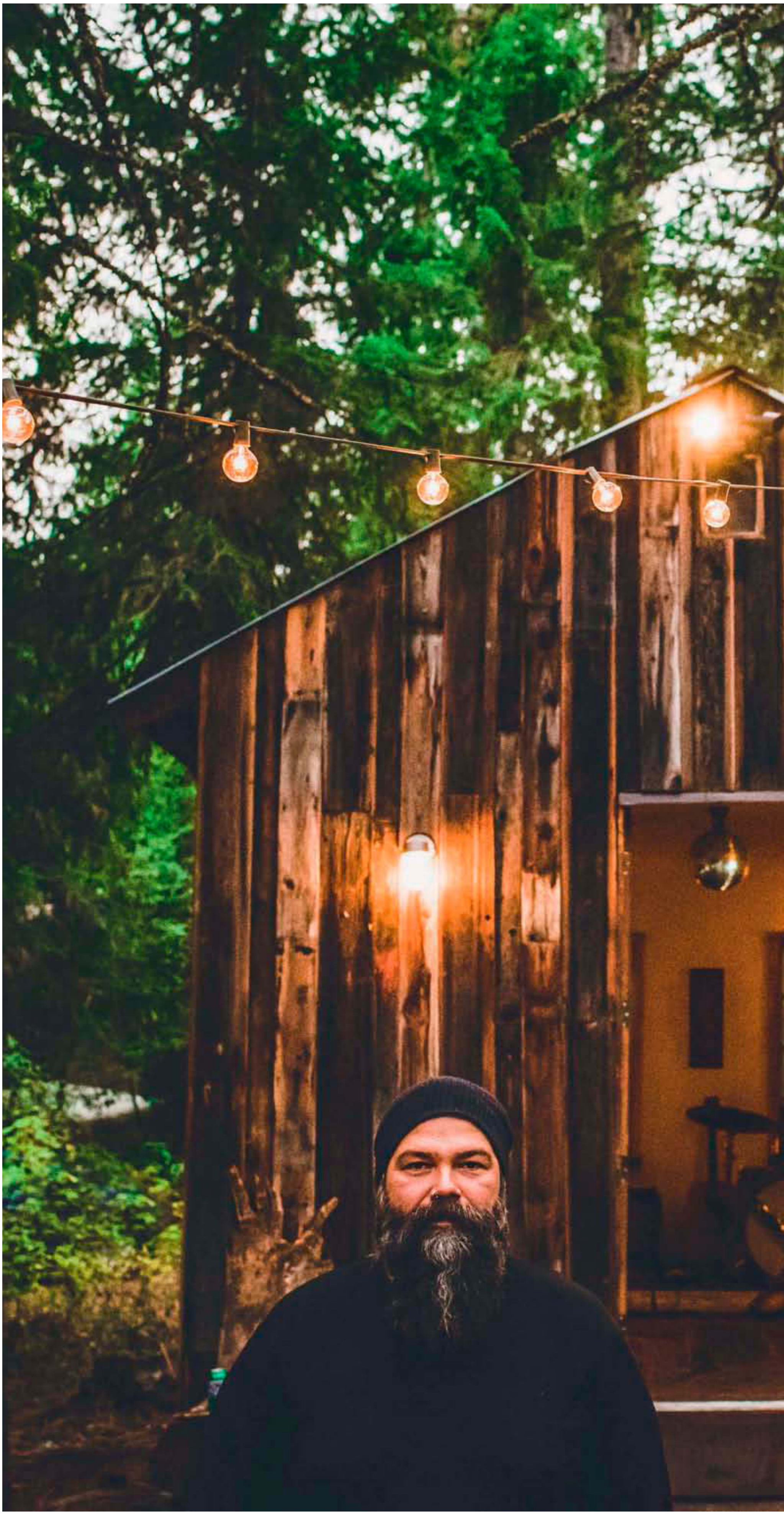
"Hanging out with the homeless and working at the shelter, really immersing myself in that scene, was a big one for me," he says. "It was as important as the music was for me at that time, and crucial to who I am as a person now. But it was also crucial to my music influence as well. It's maybe where I grab some of that lyrical inspiration, or the push between the light and the dark. There are lots of stories I've heard over 13 years, and whether they're bullshit or not doesn't matter to me," he laughs. "I started playing at the shelters during supper time. I would get up and play a bunch of Gordon Lightfoot stuff or some Neil Young songs. But I started writing more of my own songs, began playing in clubs, and finally went on tour in Canada when I was about 27."

After 13 years of working with the homeless, he admits he was burned out.

"Our political system is shit so it's not built to help those people. I got frustrated, and because I was working 70-hour weeks at the shelters, just trying to be a good person. I went on the road for seven or eight years, a long time, and just never felt comfortable in the city again. Now I live with my sweetheart and our young daughter, in a close community. We bought a place by the river with another couple, and we have two cabins, a straw-bale house, and five-and-a-half acres.

"We looked for four or five years, stayed in a shitty little apartment and just saved, saved and saved money to buy this little shack out in the woods. Was it hard to do? No, maybe financially, but I mean jeez, I've had to learn a lot being out there. I heat my own place by wood. Chop the trees down, split them up, I have to get ready for the season. I always have to do that kind of stuff. Man, it was the best thing I've ever done. I still feel like I'm living in my after-life, the one I chose.

"I like the anonymity, I like having to be responsible for my heat and my food. I like that I have those responsibilities, have to wake up and have to go and do the chores outside. I like it that my daughter gets to be out there, we have bears on the property sometimes, and there're cougars out there. I like that wild approach to life, and I like it that no one gives a shit about how long my beard is."



The most taxing aspect of being Cam Penner occurs when he and Jon Wood get together to create their albums. Wood lives in Vancouver, 500 miles and an eight-hour drive away over three mountain passes. "It's good, because we have that distance from each other and our relationship is totally based on our music," he says.

"He's an underground kind of guy and an incredible musician, who's always been playing and recording people. He doesn't listen to any other music, he just works on other people's stuff – and the songs he's working on himself. He's always working, but he's the poorest guy around too. Somehow he gets by in life just playing music and working a couple days a week making beer.

"We have a really close friendship. Besides my sweetheart, he's the person I live with most – we're on the road three or four months a year, and that's a lot of time. I met Jon nine years ago when I was on an eight-month tour across America. It was the longest solo tour I've ever done. Jon was playing with another singer-songwriter from Vancouver, and so he played with me as well. It felt good, and right after that tour, I went back to his place and recorded the album *Trouble & Mercy* in his studio. We just kept doing it, booking tours, and here we are."

Cam's rustic studio is on the cover of his latest album *Sex & Politics*. "It's not big, but I built a little stage in there so that when Jon comes it's exactly how we set up, with the drums and PA system. When we get onto that little stage, we're rehearsing like we're playing a live show, and the great thing is that we can do what we want in there.

"Jon brings all the recording equipment, but it's not state of the art. He likes stuff that sounds cool and has personality, and I think that's the way we try to make an album when we get together. We just make it our own, and make it our own way.

"We set mics up outside the studio to capture the sounds coming from the woods, and maybe mix that in a little bit; you just try different things. Jon's good because he's a bit older than me, and grew up with albums and vinyl. He always has this big thing that we're making an album, not a bunch of singles. I've always appreciated that.

"I don't want to be bored with music, it's too great and such a powerful, mysterious force. When people come to see us or come to buy our album, I want to move them, I want to move myself, challenge them even, maybe even pull the rug from underneath their feet a bit." ■

***Sex & Politics* is out now. Cam Penner will be touring the UK in November.**
www.campenner.com

SIMON MAYOR

Simon Mayor is a composer, writer, educator, performer and pioneer of mandolin music. In this candid interview he discusses the challenges of playing Handel on the mandolin, finding 'your voice' and why he was wrong to initially write-off luthier Mike Vanden

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES **IMAGES:** ACOUSTIC RECORDS

From the time when the mandolin was the acoustic instrument that never went to the ball, to today, when its increasing popularity sees ever more musicians learning to play – the name inseparable from its UK history has been Simon Mayor. Together with his partner Hilary James, Simon has been a prolific composer of mandolin and guitar music, as well as a teacher and performer. It is thanks to Simon's virtuoso skill as a mandolin player, combined with his versatility as a writer of classical and popular music, that the instrument is far better known now than when he started recording mandolin music back in 1990.

Then, it's fair to say, the mandolin occupied something of a musical backwater, both in terms of popularity and image. "Yes, that's a fair comment," Simon says. "I think it probably still is, although you would be surprised how many acoustic guitarists do have a mandolin as their second instrument. In fact, when I made my first album of mandolin music in 1990, I overdubbed instruments to make up a virtual mandolin orchestra, simply through necessity; I couldn't find any mandolin players to work with. Since the album appeared, a few popped out from wherever they were hiding, and now of course there are quite a lot of players out there."

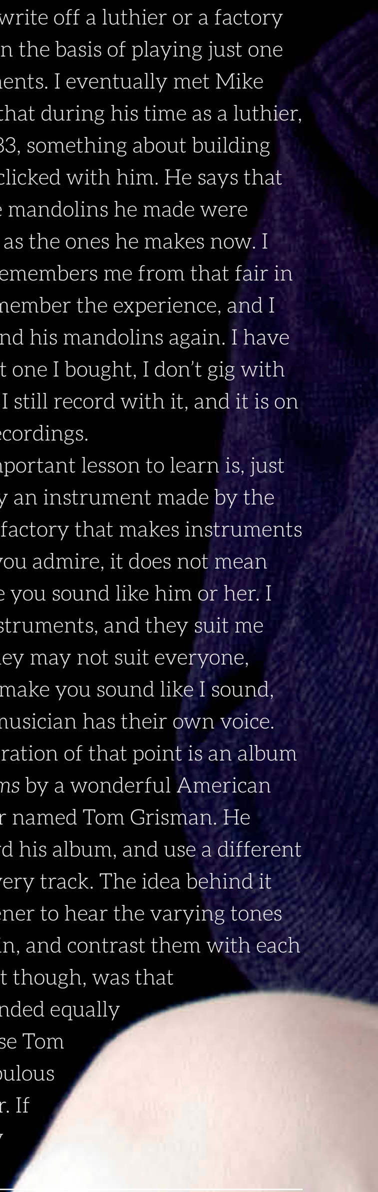
Unsurprisingly a musician of Simon's ability and experience is a treasure trove of valuable information, and the first tip he is keen to offer potential mandolin players, is the need to take your time, and make sure that the instrument you choose is the right one for you.

"If you are looking to spend some money on a mandolin, maybe you are thinking of moving up from a standard factory model to an upper-end instrument, maybe a hand-built mandolin, the right choice is crucial for two reasons. One, because you are spending a fair amount of money; and two, because it has to be the right instrument for you. I am a great believer in buying an instrument that is better than you are. It will encourage you to raise your game, to develop your technique so you can unlock all the aspects of your mandolin, and get the very best out of it. I was fortunate, I never had an intermediate mandolin, I went straight from a basic instrument to a handmade one, and the difference was absolutely staggering. The huge amount of musical sustain I got from my first handcrafted mandolin just blew me away; it was like a whole new world opening up for me.

"This is where my cautionary tale comes in", Simon continues. "My handmade mandolin was made by a luthier named Mike Vanden. I came across him when I visited a music fair in Bristol and he had a stall there, and I tried out one of his mandolins and, after I played it, I made a mental note never to buy one made by him. Four years later, a friend of mine dropped round to show me a Vanden mandolin he had bought, and I played it and it was sensational! My friend told me that the dealer he had bought his mandolin from had one more Vanden mandolin left. A couple of days later, I was in the shop buying it. I've got several of Mike's instruments now, including my mandola and my mandocello. So my advice is never write off a luthier or a factory manufacturer on the basis of playing just one of their instruments. I eventually met Mike and he told me that during his time as a luthier, sometime in 1983, something about building mandolins just clicked with him. He says that before then, the mandolins he made were just not as good as the ones he makes now. I don't think he remembers me from that fair in Bristol, but I remember the experience, and I am so glad I found his mandolins again. I have still got that first one I bought, I don't gig with it anymore, but I still record with it, and it is on almost all my recordings.

"The other important lesson to learn is, just because you buy an instrument made by the same luthier or factory that makes instruments for a musician you admire, it does not mean that it will make you sound like him or her. I love Vanden instruments, and they suit me perfectly, but they may not suit everyone, and they won't make you sound like I sound, because every musician has their own voice.

"A great illustration of that point is an album called *Tone Poems* by a wonderful American mandolin player named Tom Grisman. He decided to record his album, and use a different mandolin for every track. The idea behind it was for the listener to hear the varying tones of each mandolin, and contrast them with each other. The result though, was that every track sounded equally amazing, because Tom Grisman is a fabulous mandolin player. If you listen really



hard and play the album loads of times, you can start to pick out the tone differences in each instrument, but a player of his calibre is always going to make any mandolin he plays sound great – and that is a reflection of his skill rather than the tones and individual sounds of the mandolin he is playing. So, remember, your voice on an instrument is your voice, and you need to embrace that and develop it."

It's time to talk about Simon's recorded work, and any musician who has heard any of Vivaldi's work knows that the maestro wasn't shy when showing his talent as a composer, and the challenges he offered to anyone who was going to play his music. So the *Vivaldi Concerto For Mandolin* is certainly not for the faint-hearted. "It's not actually as hard as some of the music I have played. It was actually written for a baroque mandolin which is tuned differently to the modern instrument. The intervals are fourths rather than fifths, and that makes it more like a standard acoustic guitar to play. I have talked to baroque mandolin players who tell me that it does fall under the fingers with comparative ease. Playing it on a modern mandolin with the different intervals does make for a couple of tricky passages, but it's not a massive challenge.

"'The Arrival Of The Queen Of Sheba' by Handel is more difficult to manage. It was written in B flat by Handel, but I play it in A which makes it easier. That makes it all in first position, with the fingering work all down at the bottom of the neck. There are lots of triads in it, which I throw across three strings

because that gives me a really nice sustain, rather than fingering across two strings. It makes for greater fluency. It is harder than Vivaldi, mainly because it is really hard to memorise it. There are so many sections that are similar to each other, so if you lose your way in it you can go around in circles looking for your place. I'm lucky because I have played it so many times that it is in my muscle memory now, but learning it was quite a challenge."

Although too modest to admit it, there is no doubt that Simon Mayor was something of a pioneer when it came to recording and layering pieces for his first album. "One of the first things I did with multi-tracking was a spoof of Schubert's Trout Quintet which Hilary James that I recorded for children; we just put some daft words in it. We used to do a lot of music for the BBC and we have made five albums of music for children. I enjoyed making the music, and I enjoyed the experience of recording it using multi-tracking, so I carried on using it when I made my first album.

"The album took off in a way that I don't think an album like that would do today. Certainly not an instrumental album of mandolin music. Gloria Hunniford, who was on Radio 2 at the time, made it her 'record of the week', and she was really enthusiastic about it, which was wonderful, except that the album wasn't actually out in the shops so people couldn't get hold of it.

"I knew nothing about this. I was on a short tour in the Channel Islands, and I rang my answering machine to check messages, and there are messages from my mum sounding absolutely frantic and saying about it being made album of the week. I thought she was talking about Radio Sheffield, I had no idea she meant Radio 2!"

As a musician who delivers a lot of workshops to musicians of all ages and abilities, what are the good habits that new players need to be picking up? "One thing about a workshop is it makes you examine your own playing, because when you sit down to show other people how you play, all that instinctive playing you do on stage or at home vanishes and you are under scrutiny. I am so glad that I have played with a plectrum since the year dot. I have always played mandolin with a plectrum, and before that I played classical guitar and I always used a plectrum then too. It's surprising how many people who are learning to play the mandolin find it really alien and difficult to hold a plectrum properly. I always tell them they should think of holding a knife and fork – you don't need a strangle grip on it, but you need to be firm enough to let it do the work.

"Lots of people who have learned classical acoustic guitar tend to place their left hand on the mandolin in the same way, but unfortunately, it is of no use to them at all. People who have played violin have a far easier time making the change, because the hand placement is far more similar to a violin that it is to a guitar. Some people pick it up instinctively, and some don't and they have to put in the hours.

"I often do workshops over a weekend, and I get people who are pretty good players, to beginners who have been playing for just a couple of weeks. What I aim to do is to create a mandolin orchestra by the end of the weekend, and with maybe 40 people, that is really hard work!"

Fans of Simon's playing who want to come along and see him work his magic will almost always find that he is with friends. "I do like to play with at least one other person. I know there are some mandolin players who work solo, but I think I had my fill of that when I did all my overdubbing and mixing on my own when I started out. I usually go out on the road with my partner Hilary James; she plays guitar and bass mandolin, so we have a good time. We also work with the Mandolinquents, which is myself, Hilary, Gerald Garcia and Richard Collins, who is a champion banjo player.

And the future for Simon? "Well, we had a pretty intensive winter with gigs last year, and I worked on three books, one for fingerstyle guitar, and now I am working on writing and arranging for a project in America where some ensembles are going to play some of my compositions, which is really exciting. Then in the autumn of this year, we will be back out on the road in the UK." ■

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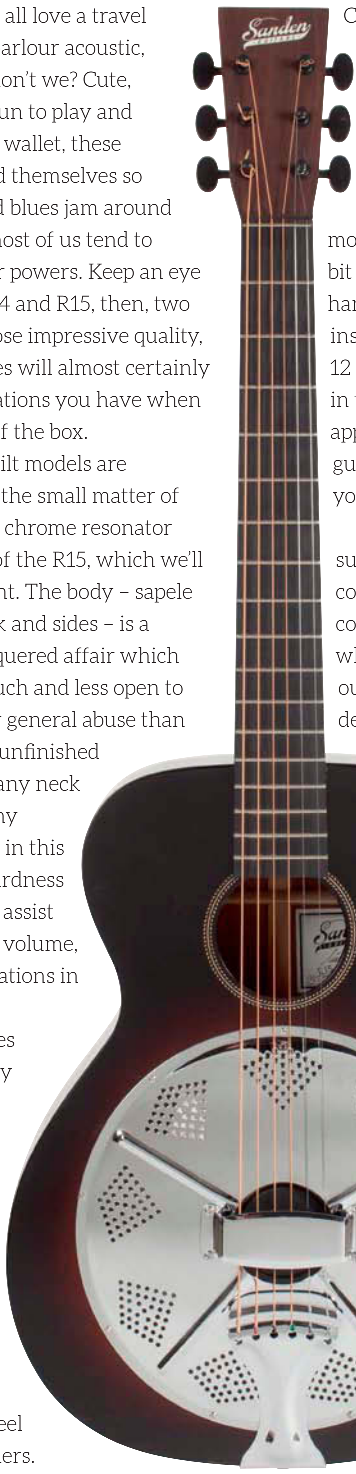
SANDEN R14 & R15

Everyone likes a bit of Swede – but do Sanden's new travel parlour guitars resonate with Joel McIver, or leave him hungry for more?

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER **IMAGES:** RICHARD ECCLESTONE



We all love a travel parlour acoustic, don't we? Cute, fun to play and usually easy on the wallet, these midsize guitars lend themselves so readily to a folk and blues jam around the campfire that most of us tend to underestimate their powers. Keep an eye out for Sanden's R14 and R15, then, two travel parlours whose impressive quality, playability and tones will almost certainly outstrip the expectations you have when you pull them out of the box.

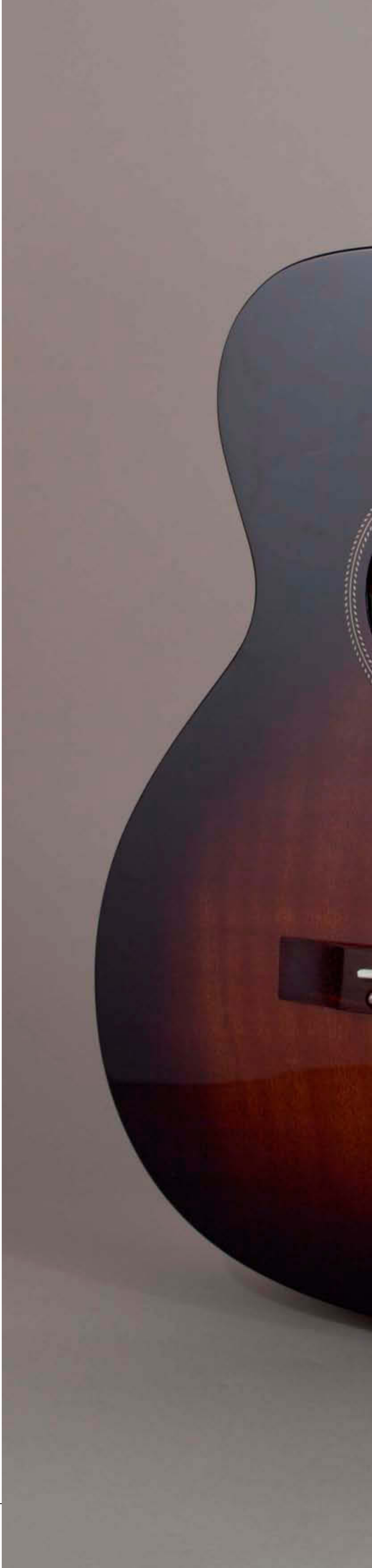
Both Swedish-built models are identical except for the small matter of the whacking great chrome resonator stuck on the front of the R15, which we'll come to in a moment. The body – sapele mahogany top, back and sides – is a smooth, evenly lacquered affair which feels silky to the touch and less open to scratches and other general abuse than your usual oiled or unfinished woods. The mahogany neck comes with an ebony fretboard, welcome in this case because the hardness of the wood should assist with both tone and volume, important considerations in guitars of this size.

The other features are all professionally engineered. Take a peek inside and the bracing seems solid, if standard. The rosewood bridge is much as you'd expect, too. However, you'll be pleasantly surprised by the smooth, powerful feel of the Schertler tuners. Cheap machine heads crop up surprisingly often, even at the mid to high price point which the Sandens occupy, so it's a relief that these are chunky and reliable in feel.

Grab the R14 and stick it on your lap. You could strap it on and play standing up, of course, although players of the more amply nourished persuasion may feel a bit odd with what is close to a half-size guitar hanging off them. Either way, this dinky instrument feels comfortable. There are only 12 accessible frets, so your options are limited in that sense, but at the same time this feels appropriate. Who needs a lower cutaway on a guitar whose volume necessarily peaks when you hit a big old barre chord?

The first thing you'll notice is the surprising volume the R14 possesses. Of course, a travel parlour guitar doesn't compare with a jumbo or dreadnought when it comes to sheer decibels, but strum out a fully-fledged E or G chord and there'll definitely be enough oomph to scare the cat. The neck, slender enough for plenty of expression, encourages extrovert playing – hardly what we expected when we first laid eyes on these humble-looking guitars.

Our review models came with medium-gauge strings and a friendly, middling action, so we found ourselves fingerpicking and strumming away with ease. Kaki King-style tapping is perfectly doable, if less easy to achieve than on a full-size instrument. Blues bends are also part of the fun thanks to the easy-to-work-with string tension, and your soulful, Nick Drake



SANDEN R14

NEED TO KNOW

Model: R14
RRP: £828
Body Size: Travel parlour
Made In: Sweden
Top: Sapele mahogany
Back and Sides: Sapele mahogany
Bridge: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 18
Tuners: Schertler
Nut Width: 44 mm
Scale Length: 580 mm
Onboard Electrics: N/A (B-band A1.2 and UST pickup £124 extra)
Strings Fitted: Medium
Gig Bag/Case Included: £91 extra for a form-fitted hardcase

SANDEN R15

NEED TO KNOW

Model: R15
RRP: £993
Body Size: Travel parlour
Made In: Sweden
Top: Sapele mahogany
Back and Sides: Sapele mahogany
Bridge: Cone Beard
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 18
Tuners: Schertler
Nut Width: 44 mm
Scale Length: 610 mm
Onboard Electrics: N/A (B-band A1.2 and UST pickup £124 extra)
Strings Fitted: Medium
Gig Bag/Case Included: £91 extra for a form-fitted hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Impressive volume for body size; resophonic performance is excellent for a sub-£1,000 guitar
Cons: Electronic EQ would have been useful as standard
Overall: Charming guitars with bags of appeal at this crowded price point

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Value for Money: ★★★★☆
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor

CONTACT DETAILS

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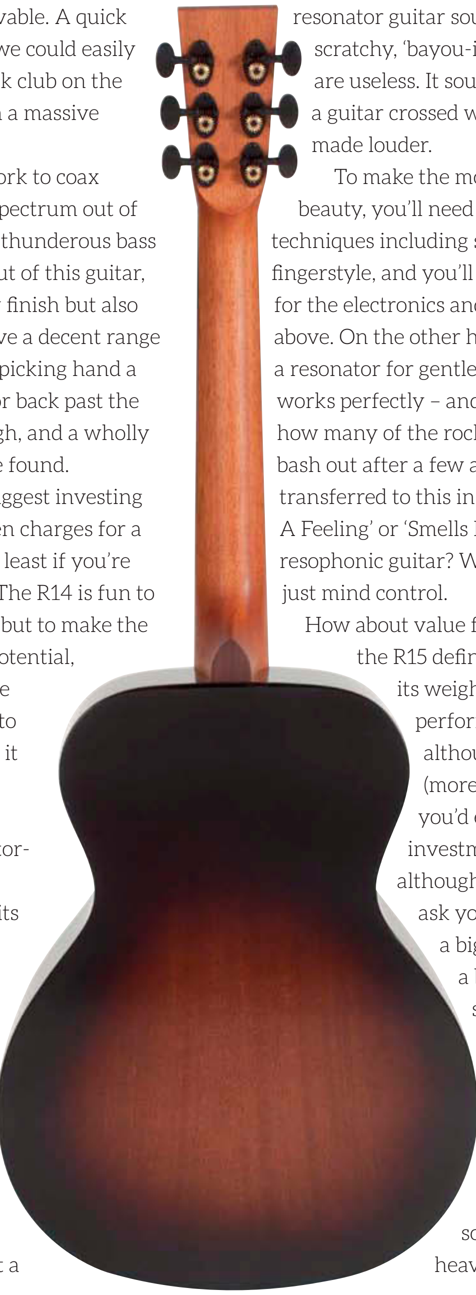

drones are entirely achievable. A quick retune to DADGAD and we could easily imagine ourselves in a folk club on the Isle of Skye in 1971 – with a massive woollen jumper on...

Tonally, you need to work to coax the extreme ends of the spectrum out of this guitar. You won't get thunderous bass or ear-bleeding top end out of this guitar, partly because of its body finish but also due to its size, so to achieve a decent range you'll need to move your picking hand a fairly long way forward or back past the soundhole. Do that, though, and a wholly useable tone range can be found.

For these reasons I'd suggest investing the extra £124 that Sanden charges for a pickup and electronics, at least if you're considering playing live. The R14 is fun to play, don't get me wrong, but to make the most of its considerable potential, plug in. It's almost as if the guitar needs a bit of help to push it to the level where it deserves to be.

On which note, let's head to the R15, a resonator-equipped twin to the R14 that looks splendid, with its chunky resophonic plate set off beautifully by the mahogany wood into which it's fixed. Dig in with a pick or fingers, and the same feel as the other, significantly quieter guitar is there, but the tone is obviously very different. Now, how to describe in words what a resonator guitar sounds like? Bluesy, tinny, scratchy, 'bayou-ish'... all those adjectives are useless. It sounds to us essentially like a guitar crossed with a banjo and then made louder.

To make the most of this resophonic beauty, you'll need a variety of killer techniques including slide and chickenpicking fingerstyle, and you'll also need to shell out for the electronics and pickup mentioned above. On the other hand, if you just require a resonator for gentle folk chords, it still works perfectly – and you'd be surprised how many of the rock standards that we all bash out after a few ales sound great when transferred to this instrument. 'More Than A Feeling' or 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' on a resophonic guitar? Well, why not? Rules are just mind control.

How about value for money? Well, the R15 definitely punches above its weight when it comes to performance versus size, although for close to a grand (more with the pickup) you'd expect it to repay your investment. It does just that, although you might want to ask yourself whether buying a bigger guitar would be a better idea if you're seriously playing resonator music.

Again, high quality is squarely at the front and centre of the R15's design, with the resonator a genuinely solid – but somehow not heavy – addition to the body

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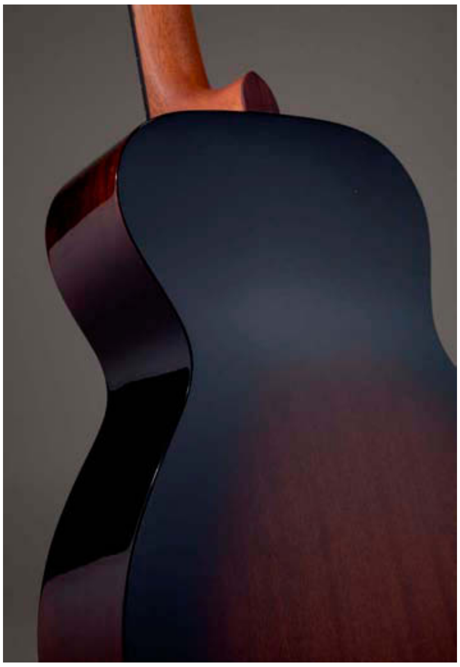
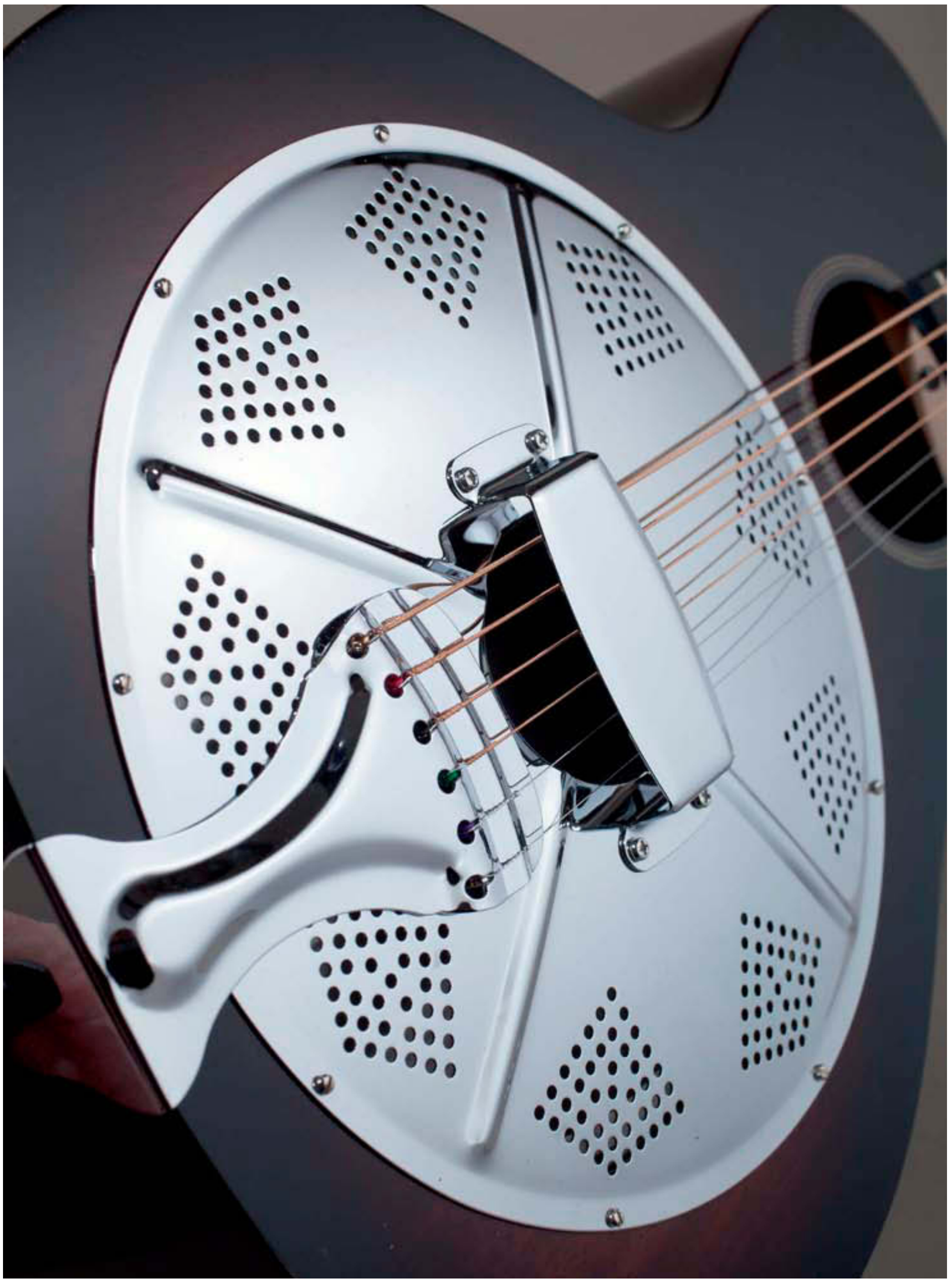
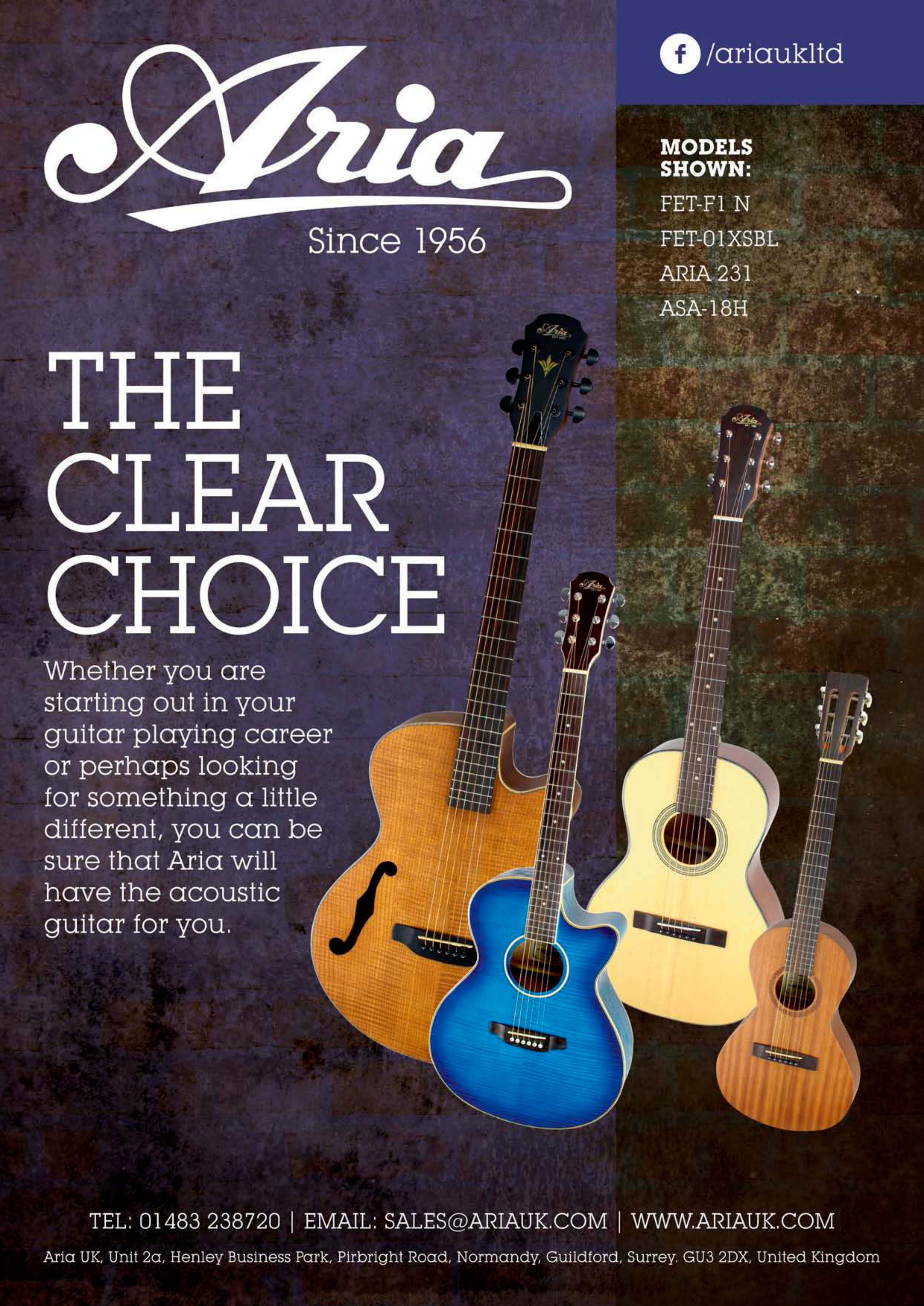


"You'd be surprised how many of the rock standards that we all bash out after a few ales sound great when transferred to the R15"





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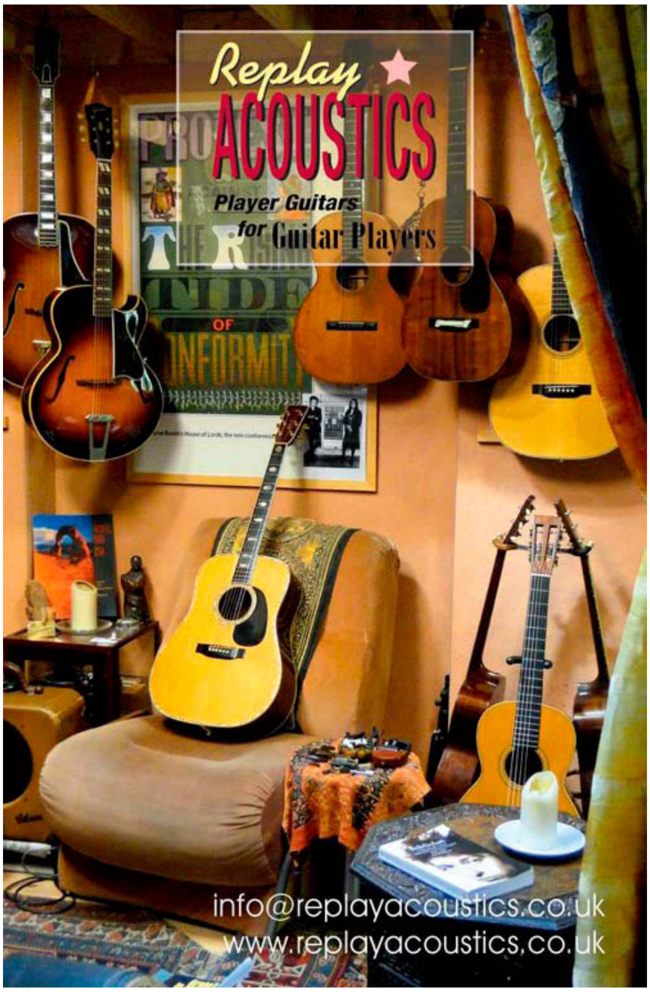
"The neck encourages extrovert playing – hardly what we expected when we first laid eyes on these humble-looking guitars"

rather than a glued-on chrome dinnerplate. The great thing about these guitars is that the resonator looks complex – and under the hood, it is – but playing it, and pulling off that instantly recognisable Seasick Steve tone, isn't tricky at all. Think of the intro to Morcheeba's 'Part Of The Process' or (if you're under 30) the jaunty plucked tones of American Authors' 'Best Day Of My Life' and you're most of the way to grasping the earthy tones you can pull out of this excellent guitar.

Note that super-high, glass-breaking tones would be more easily accessed from an all-metal resonator guitar: Gretsch do one for £570 or thereabouts, Epiphone for under £500. Instead, the Sanden R15's upper tone range is best described as warm rather than spiky: you won't be damaging anyone's eardrums, or glassware, with this guitar. Take heed of this if you're planning to access that particular tone.

So what are we left with? Two eminently playable guitars that will travel more or less anywhere, hence the 'travel parlour' designation; deliver the goods in the live situation (if you've splashed out on the electric bits, at least); and do both of those things without breaking your shoulder, or hopefully the bank. That said, there are hundreds of at least broadly similar guitars at around £1,000, many made with as much attention to detail as these, so for your sanity's sake, shop around. And think hard about whether you need a bigger guitar: these midsize instruments are wonderful in many ways, but there's a lot to be said for the sound and performance of a full-size piece of wood, after all. ■



Ashbury have developed many new lines at their luthiery workshop in Viet Nam. These hand crafted instruments have been brought to life by concert guitaritst and factory manager John Jiang in consultation with Ashbury's British designers.

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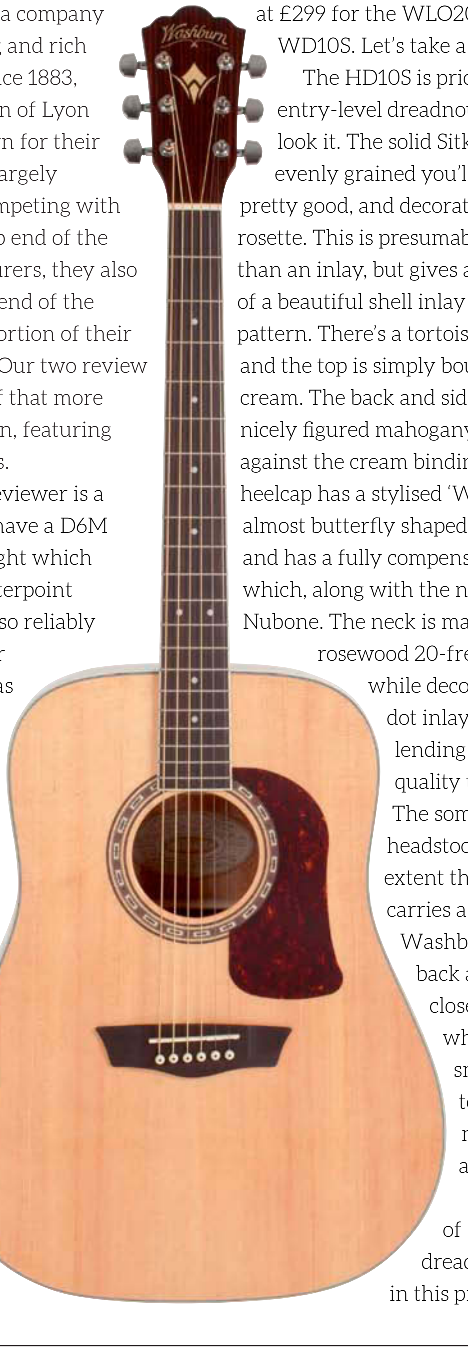
WASHBURN HD10S & WLO20S

Washburn released a batch of new acoustics at this year's NAMM show. Sam Wise take a first look at two from the Heritage Series, aimed at first-upgraders

WORDS: SAM WISE **IMAGES:** RICHARD ECCLESTONE



Washburn is a company with a long and rich history. Since 1883, as a division of Lyon and Healy, now mostly known for their harps, Washburn has made largely high quality instruments, competing with the leading brands for the top end of the market. Like most manufacturers, they also take an interest in the lower end of the market, building a good proportion of their instruments today in China. Our two review models are representatives of that more affordable breed of Washburn, featuring solid tops at reasonable prices.

Full disclosure here: this reviewer is a long term Washburn user. I have a D6M – an all mahogany dreadnought which provides an interesting counterpoint to most review guitars. I'm also reliably informed that *Acoustic* editor Steve Harvey's first guitar was a Washburn.

One striking thing about these much less expensive guitars is that Washburn has returned to a headstock style that echoes their vintage models, where my mahogany model has a very simple headstock shape. In fact, these two, despite different price points, have more in common than not. Both have solid Sitka tops and laminate back and sides (albeit with different veneers), and their RRPs are very close, at £299 for the WLO20S, and £249 for the WD10S. Let's take a closer look.

The HD10S is priced not far above an entry-level dreadnought, but it doesn't look it. The solid Sitka top isn't the most evenly grained you'll ever see, but it's pretty good, and decorated with an attractive rosette. This is presumably a transfer, rather than an inlay, but gives a decent impression of a beautiful shell inlay in an art deco pattern. There's a tortoiseshell pickguard, and the top is simply bound in black and cream. The back and sides are veneered in nicely figured mahogany, which sits nicely against the cream binding, and the cream heelcap has a stylised 'W' engraving. The almost butterfly shaped bridge is rosewood, and has a fully compensated saddle, which, along with the nut, is presumably Nubone. The neck is mahogany, and the rosewood 20-fret fingerboard – while decorated with simple dot inlays – is also bound, lending a further sense of quality to the instrument.

The somewhat torch-shaped headstock mirrors to an extent the inlay, and also carries a classy, calligraphic Washburn logo. On the back are unbranded closed back tuners which, if not as buttery smooth as a set of top end Grovers, are nonetheless accurate and steady.

There are a lot of spruce topped dreadnoughts out there in this price range, and

WASHBURN HD10S

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Washburn
Model: HD10S
RRP: £249
Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Bridge: Rosewood
Neck: Satin Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: Chrome Diecast
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 25-5/16”
Onboard Electrics: No
Strings Fitted: Cleartone 7412B light gauge phosphor bronze
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Classy looker, big tone and a great price
Cons: Big tone could be uncontrollable for a beginner
Overall: Great value, and worthy of your time

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★☆
Build Quality: ★★★½☆
Value for Money: ★★★★½
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

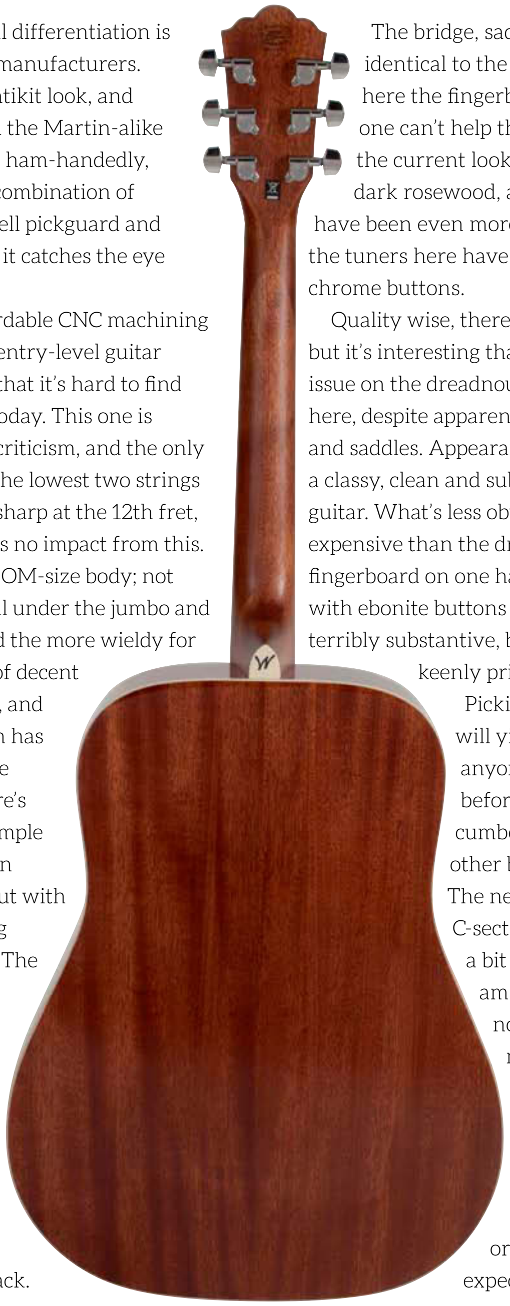
CONTACT DETAILS:

www.soundtech.co.uk/washburn

creating a bit of visual differentiation is a challenge for most manufacturers. Many stick to an identikit look, and those who stray from the Martin-alike path sometimes do so ham-handedly, but the Washburn’s combination of headstock, tortoiseshell pickguard and stylish rosette means it catches the eye without grating.

The advent of affordable CNC machining has transformed the entry-level guitar market to the extent that it’s hard to find a badly made guitar today. This one is cosmetically beyond criticism, and the only possible issue is that the lowest two strings are a couple of cents sharp at the 12th fret, but in practice there is no impact from this.

The WLO20S is an OM-size body; not parlour small, but well under the jumbo and dreadnought size, and the more wieldy for it. Another Sitka top of decent quality is a good start, and once again Washburn has made a good fist of the styling. This time there’s no pickguard and a simple bi-colour rosette, again probably a transfer, but with the look of alternating rosewood and maple. The top is bound in what looks to be maple rather than ivoroid, and the back and sides are veneered with rosewood, nicely figured in a way which is easier to achieve with a veneer than a solid back.



The bridge, saddle and neck are identical to the dreadnought, but here the fingerboard is unbound, and one can’t help thinking that, while the current look works well with the dark rosewood, a maple binding might have been even more attractive. Finally, the tuners here have ebonite, rather than chrome buttons.

Quality wise, there is nothing to criticise, but it’s interesting that the tiny intonation issue on the dreadnought is not in evidence here, despite apparently identical necks and saddles. Appearance wise, this is again a classy, clean and subtly differentiated guitar. What’s less obvious is why it’s more expensive than the dreadnought. A bound fingerboard on one hand, and maple binding with ebonite buttons on the other don’t seem terribly substantive, but no matter, both are keenly priced guitars.

Picking up the dreadnought will yield no surprises to anyone who has played one before: it’s big, relatively cumbersome and wider than other body shapes at the waist. The neck is a comfortable C-section – I would prefer a bit more heft to it, but I am forced to accept that’s not what the rest of the market wants. The action is comfortably low, and, with the light gauge strings, this is an easy player.

The tone is more or less what you might expect, in that there’s plenty

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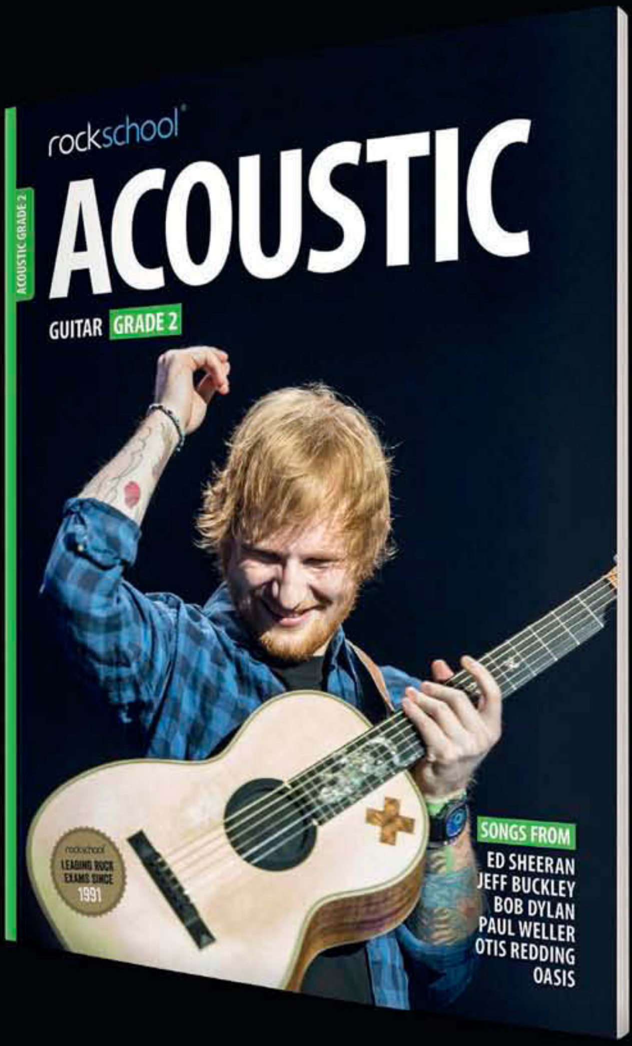

"What struck me about the tunes I had the opportunity to contribute to was that they were associated with Robert Johnson and Jimi Hendrix, two of most influential artists in the history of popular American music."

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"The dreadnought's big body means tons of bass punch too, so if you want that traditional boom-chick, you'll be well off with this guitar, but that's not all it has to offer"

of everything. The spruce top gives you plenty of treble headroom; it's bright and sparkling up there, but not in the somewhat shrieky way that you occasionally find. The big body means tons of bass punch too, so if you want that traditional boom-chick, you'll be well off with this guitar, but that's not all it has to offer.

The HD10S is pretty malleable. In the hands of a reasonable player it's capable of real subtlety. Fingerstyle can be delicate and balanced, while driving it hard with a plectrum brings out plenty of volume without becoming too boomy. There's always the slight risk with a dreadnought that a beginning player will hit the bottom end too hard and create overwhelming bass, but this guitar isn't pushing that on you. Indeed, if anything it's a little quieter than you might expect from such a big body.

The WLO20S is significantly more approachable on a physical level. The body is shallower, it's slimmer at the waist and those of smaller stature may find it more welcoming. The neck and action are pretty much indistinguishable from the dreadnought, but, despite the identical woods (the veneer on the laminate makes no difference), the tone is considerably different. The treble is similarly bright, but feels, for whatever reason, slightly more focused.

Flatpicked bluegrass lines aren't especially more cutting, but there's a greater solidity somehow than with the dreadnought. The midtones aren't lush in the way that they might be on a more expensive guitar (although of course the spruce will open up over time), but there's a hint of warmth and complexity there. The bass is notably tighter and more easily controllable than on the dreadnought, but retains plenty of punch, and the relative beginners who are likely to be buying at this price range may find the orchestra model more forgiving. While both have plenty of winning characteristics, it's not difficult to see why, in these days of good pickup systems, the predominance of the dreadnought has ended. If you don't need extreme levels of volume and projection, it's easier to get a balanced tone out of a smaller top and a sound chamber of lesser volume.

Neither of these guitars will disgrace itself around the kitchen table, and it's hard to

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WASHBURN WL020S

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Washburn
Model: WL020S
RRP: £299
Body Size: Orchestra
Made In: China
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Bridge: Rosewood
Neck: Satin Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: Chrome Diecast w/Ebonite buttons
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 25-5/16"
Onboard Electrics: No
Strings Fitted: Cleartone 7412B light gauge phosphor bronze
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Understated good looks and a focused tone
Cons: Slightly more expensive that its sister
Overall: A great, flexible guitar for the money

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★☆
Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Value for Money: ★★★★½
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS:

www.soundtech.co.uk/washburn

"The bass on the WL020S is tighter and more easily controllable than on the dreadnought, but it retains plenty of punch"

imagine that, with so many pickup-equipped guitars out there, anyone would choose one of these to compete in a band situation. In front of a close mic at a café gig, the WL020S is the more likely to perform well, it's tighter tone being easier to capture.

These are fine guitars at a bargain price, but if your budget is £250-300, you have a lot of choice, and the Washburns aren't streets ahead of the competition. Both are, however, thoroughly worthy of your consideration.

For us, they are both above average style wise, and in the top bracket of quality for the money. We like the dreadnought's styling somewhat more than the orchestra's, but the orchestra tone is more manageable and flexible. The key thing is if either lights up your eyes visually, you should play them – they will not disappoint. ■

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14816 - Maestro Vera IR-SB-A Vintage All Solid
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13207 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
12222 - Martin & Co DX1AE Electro Acoustic
15164 - Martin 000RS1
14479 - Martin 000RSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
14780 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior
14477 - Martin DRS2 Electro Acoustic Guitar
14478 - Martin DRSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
13856 - Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature Ed Electro
13674 - Martin OMXAE Electro Acoustic, Black
12439 - Northwood Custom Koa 80D Electro
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D-nought
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlour Electro Acoustic
14926 - PJ Eggle Saulda Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14927 - PJ Eggle Saulda Elec/Acoustic
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acousti
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Studio
9822 - Rainsong S-WS1000N2 WS Studio Electro
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15259 - Rainsong SMCX Smokey Series
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
15077 - Takamine EF407 Electro Acoustic, Used
14251 - Takamine EF508KC NEX Cutaway Electro
12236 - Takamine EN20C Electro Acoustic
14253 - Takamine GD30CE Electro Acoustic, Nat
14257 - Takamine GF30CE Brown Sunburst
14261 - Takamine GY93E New Yorker Electro
14249 - Takamine P1DC Electro Acoustic Guitar
13295 - Tanglewood TPESFCEZS Electro Acoustic
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14953 - Tanglewood Evolution IV TSF CE Natural
14950 - Tanglewood Evolution IV TSF CE Red
14954 - Tanglewood EvolutionTSFCE Sunburst Gloss
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
13480 - Tanglewood TVC Koa Electro Acoustic
13462 - Tanglewood TVC XB
13459 - Tanglewood TW115 SSCE
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads
13485 - Taylor 515CE Electro Acoustic, Used
12571 - Taylor 814CE Electro Acoustic, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
13399 - Vintage VECJ100 Jumbo Acoustic Black
8306 - Westcoast SW201-VT Electro Acoustic, Nat
14427 - Yamaha APX1000 Slimline Guitar, Natural
14434 - Yamaha APX700 II Thinline, Natural
14492 - Yamaha CPX1000 Electro Acoustic, Natural
14441 - Yamaha CPX500 III, Black
6961 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Acoustic Sandburst
9304 - Yamaha CPX900 Brown Sunburst
14423 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Brown Sunburst
14422 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Natural
14421 - Yamaha FJX720SC Electro, Sunburst
14420 - Yamaha FX310A Guitar, Natural
6966 - Yamaha FX370C Dreadnought Electro, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic, Natural
8141 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String Guitar
14418 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String Guitar
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel

Classical Guitars

15241 - Admira A15 Classical Guitar
15240 - Admira A20 Classical Handcrafted Guitar
14922 - Admira Alba 4/4 Full Size Classical
0000 - Azahar - 3 Mode;s In Stock Now
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
8240 - Mendieta Estudio T Classical Guitar
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Anniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
6336 - Ramirez R2 Classical Guitar
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
6441 - Roberto C2 Classical Guitar
14942 - Tanglewood DBT12 3/4 Classical Guitar
9483 - Tanglewood DBT34 3/4 Classical Guitar
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical

12 Strings

13553 - Eko Vintage Ranger 12 in Black
14525 - Guild JF230-AB USA-Made c1997
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty . Nat
14398 - Vintage VE2000GG12 Giltrap 12-String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett

Mandolin Family

8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15158 - Ashbury GR31017 Celtic Mandolin, Used
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
14028 - Breedlove Crossover OO O Hole , Black
14500 - Breedlove Crossover Mandolin, VV
12568 - Fender Concert Tone "F" 63S Mandolin
14740 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 52E
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
4551 - Jimmy Moon A Plus E Electro, Natural
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon A Plus Electro Bouzouki, Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
9430 - Ozark Flat Back Bouzouki
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

Acoustic Amplification

0000 - AER - 14 Models in Stock
11205 - Acus One 5 Protective Bag
13831 - Acus One Ten, Wood Finsh
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
9166 - Loudbox Artist
4548 - Fishman Loudbox Mini - 60W, 1x6.5"
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
13282 - Markbass AC101 Acoustic Combo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
15059 - Marshall AS50D RED - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
13018 - Tanglewood T3 30W Acoustic Amplifier
8108 - Tanglewood T6, 60W
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

12564 - Barnes & Mullins BJ306 6-String Banjo
4371 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
14820 - Baton Rouge Tenor Uke Cutaway, LEFTY
14648 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor Ukulele
14650 - Baton Rouge V4TCE Electro Tenor Uke
14395 - Beano Ukulele Minnie the Minx Uke Outfit
14394 - Beano Ukulele Outfit Gnasher Ukulele Outfit
15147 - Blue Moon Tenor Ukulele Pear-Shaped
14697 - Collings UT2 Tenor Ukulele, Secondhand
14557 - Deering Goodtime Ukulele Banjo
14674 - Eko Evo Soprano Ukulele, Cedar Top
9081 - Fender Mino'Aka Concert Ukulele
13616 - Fender Piha'ea Soprano Ukulele
12800 - Kala KA-BNJ/BK-C Concert Banjo Ukulele
9345 - Kala U Bass Electro Ac In Solid Mahogany
8127 - Kala U Bass in Mahogany
4722 - Kala U-Bass 2 Electro Acoustic Ukulele
13978 - Laka Concert Ukulele with GigBag
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
13883 - Magic Fluke M30 Flea Sop Uke, Mahogany
14866 - Magic Fluke Timber Elec. Bass, Fretless
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Elec. Bass, Fretless
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
8514 - Ohana BK10 Baritone Ukulele
8515 - Ohana BK20 Baritone Ukulele
12610 - Ohana BK22 Baritone Ukulele
12609 - Ohana BKB35E Bass Ukulele
13633 - Ohana CK15BK Concert Ukulele, Black
13634 - Ohana CK15BL Concert Ukulele, Blue
12605 - Ohana CK15Z Concert Ukulele
8520 - Ohana CK35CE Electro Concert Ukulele
12603 - Ohana CK38 Concert Ukulele
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8508 - Ohana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
13637 - Ohana SK10GN Soprano Uke, Matte Green
4712 - Ohana SK10S Soprano Ukulele
13636 - Ohana SK10YW Soprano Uke, Matte Yellow
13644 - Ohana SK12 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20S Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Ohana SK21M Premium Mahogany Sop.
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
8517 - Ohana SK22Z Sop Ukulele Zebrawood B&S
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
14211 - Ohana SK70BA Spruce & Morinda Sop Uke
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele
7108 - Ohana SK70MG Soprano Ukulele
14212 - Ohana SK70WG Soprano Uke, Willow B & S
7107 - Ohana SK75R Soprano Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
13310 - Ohana Baritone Uke Gig Bag
5009 - Ozark Ukulele Banjo
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
10424 - Uluru Lehua I Soprano Ukulele
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele

Travel & Tenor Guitars

14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
13856 - Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature Ed Electro
13324 - Martin LX Red Little Martin
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
9588 - Tanglewood TW15 Baby All Solid Travel
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Secondhand
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
4615 - Dobro, circa 1975, Original Vintage
12613 - Fender FR50CE Cutaway Electro Resonator
14530 - Gibson Dobro USA Made Resonator, Used
12737 - ResoVille Parkville MS12 Single Cone Nic
12730 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Nickel
12732 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Gold
12731 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Red Cop
13244 - ResoVille Edgewood WS12R Maple Parlor
12738 - ResoVille Lincolnwood WS12 Reso, Maple

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

ASHDOWN WOODSMAN JUMBO & PARLOUR AMPLIFIERS

The new Woodsman range of acoustic amplifiers offer a choice of models that are suited for either home use or small club/pub venues

WORDS: ROBBIE GLADWELL **IMAGES:** ASHDOWN ENGINEERING

Ashdown Engineering is one of the UK's premier amplifier manufacturers with an ever expanding range of products. The new Woodsman amplifiers are the latest offerings from the company, which are aimed squarely at the acoustic guitarist.

There are three models in the range and I've spent the last few days playing with two of them: the Jumbo and the Parlour. The Classic, not tested here, sits between the two.

As the name suggests, the Jumbo is the larger of the two and features two 8" speakers and a high frequency speaker. The amplifier section has a power rating of 65-watt. On this amp the control panel is on the front and is slanted backwards for easy viewing. It also has a more comprehensive control set-up than the other amps in the range, featuring Volume, Bass and Treble controls for the mic channel along with a combined XLR and TRS Jack input socket. Adjacent to this is a Phantom Power switch for condenser microphones and an Auxiliary Volume Control which is situated between the two channels. This can be used in conjunction with an MP3 player.

The instrument channel has a standard 1/4" jack socket which is switchable between active and passive guitars. A handy feature is a two colour LED power indicator, which also warns you if the input starts to clip – this is quite common with piezo pickups. Some high frequency volume 'spikes' aren't always audible, but they can easily damage an amplifier's circuitry or speakers if not detected early. The control section features Volume, Bass and Treble, with Phase and tonal Shape buttons situated between the volume and bass knobs.

The Phase button is a useful tool to help combat the feedback issues that most acoustic guitars suffer from. By putting the guitar out of phase with the amplifier you can reduce or virtually eliminate feedback. This is particularly useful when used in conjunction with the Notch Filter, which, as the name suggests, has a narrower frequency range, and is frequency sweep-able to help locate particularly stubborn resonant feedback issues.

The Shape button is very useful too. This gives a 'smiley face' dip in the midrange, which can make guitars that have a harsh tone sound less 'boxy' and more acoustic in nature.

The master section has a digital reverb that is switchable between Hall and Plate effects. You can also choose between long or short reverb times. An associated level control allows you to dial in the exact amount of reverb according to your personal taste. This is a great sounding, effective and easy to use digital reverb. The final control on the front panel is the master volume.

The back panel is split into two sections. The first houses the mains switch and the IEC power socket. The other section is labelled Ins and Outs and, as you might expect from the description, has all the ancillary connections. There are two auxiliary input sockets, one 3.5mm and one 1/4" (6mm). Having the two sockets is particularly useful as you could either plug in another guitar or your MP3 player. You can also connect your favourite effects pedals such as a chorus, delay, or even a looper pedal via the send/return sockets.

Should you require more volume you have an XLR DI output to enable you to connect to a PA system. In such a scenario, you could then use the Jumbo as your own personal onstage monitor cabinet.

The Tolex style covering on the Jumbo features an attractive embossed Floral/Paisley pattern. This covering appears to be heavy duty and looks extremely resilient. It should easily withstand the knocks and scrapes of daily use and in-car travel. The cabinet appears to be quite well made and looks extremely sturdy. It has an attractive retro leather handle and woven speaker cloth which is the same colour as the cabinet.

The Ashdown Parlour amplifier is much smaller and has a simpler control layout. It has a power rating of 25-watt RMS and is fitted with a single 8" speaker. The main control panel is found on the back of the amplifier and consists of an XLR/TRS microphone input with its own volume control. There are no tone controls for this section.

The instrument channel has a single 1/4" (6mm) jack input but has a more sophisticated tonal network comprising of bass, middle and treble controls. The master section features reverb and master volume controls. The

ASHDOWN
WOODSMAN JUMBO

Price: £369
Made In: China
Power: 65-watts
Number of Channels: Two
Speakers: 2 x 8" Celestions
Features: Include three-band EQ for the Mic Channel, enhanced reverb algorithms (including Hall and Spring settings), transparent effects loop for use with external devices.
Microphone Input: Yes
Dimensions: 48cm x 23cm x 34.5cm (W x D x H)
Weight: 12kg

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Well-built, durable and competent amp producing an excellent acoustic tone
Cons: In view of a RRP of £369, nothing comes to mind
Overall: A very well-made, capable amp suitable for a range of settings and applications

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★½
Build Quality: ★★★★½
Value for Money: ★★★★½
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor

CONTACT DETAILS

www.ashdownmusic.com

> **"The Jumbo was a breeze at high volume – with the shape and notch controls working well"**

reverb isn't as flexible as that found on the Jumbo model as it has one fixed effect with a medium reverb time duration and a single level control. No switches are used to control the effect. There are two auxiliary inputs, a 3.5mm jack and a 1/4" (6mm) jack. The volume of the auxiliary channel is controlled by the master volume control.

Underneath the control panel is the panel with the mains switch and IEC power socket. The cabinet is of sturdy construction and features the same style leather handle, along with the attractive covering and speaker cloth, as the Jumbo model.

During the time the amps have been on test, I've tried both amplifiers with a few different makes and models of guitar. I also used both amps at a local theatre on a couple of gigs to see how they would cope with a larger stage. I Initially set all the controls flat with no reverb and no notch filter just to see how the various guitars sounded. My test guitars were a

ASHDOWN
WOODSMAN PARLOUR

Price: £149
Made In: China
Power: 25-watts
Number of Channels: One
Speakers: 1 x 8" Celestion & Horn
Features: Include Mic Channel with independent volume control, Phase reverse, notch filter, guitar channel with volume, bass, mid and treble controls, studio-quality digital reverb, and a master volume
Microphone Input: Yes
Dimensions: 30cm x 17.5cm x 16.5cm (W x D x H)
Weight: 4.25kg

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Compact design, portability and easy to use functionality, real value for money
Cons: May struggle with feedback issues when pushed hard
Overall: Though a semi-skimmed version, the Parlour has plenty to offer for home use and open mic nights

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ★★★★☆
Build Quality: ★★★★½
Value for Money: ★★★★☆
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor

CONTACT DETAILS

www.ashdownmusic.com

Taylor 414CE, a Breedlove C25 SSE 'American Gold Series' and a Gibson Chet Atkins SST.

In the rehearsal studio the acoustic guitars sounded warm and sweet through both amps with the Breedlove sounding slightly more naturally 'acoustic' than the Taylor. The Chet Atkins, which is a solid body electro acoustic guitar, sounded more strident with a harder midrange than the acoustic guitars. With the additional tone controls on the Jumbo amp, along with the 'shape' button I got closer to a natural sounding acoustic guitar. The operational frequency centres on the tone controls are excellent for both amplifiers. They added just the right degree of warmth on the bass end along with a sweet treble boost without the harshness that some cheaper acoustic amplifiers have. This is probably due to the use of higher quality HF speakers, rather than a cheap piezo horn.

Cranking the volume up though introduced feedback issues with the Taylor and the Breedlove – as you might expect – with them being resonant hollow body guitars. The Parlour was slightly more prone to feedback, but that is because it was out of its comfort zone at higher levels. I think the name Parlour is the clue here. Even so, with judicious adjustment of the tone controls and amp positioning it worked fine – even with a drummer in the mix.

The Jumbo was a breeze at high volume, with shape and notch controls working well without sucking the natural tonality from the sound. The Chet Atkins scored well at higher volumes with both amplifiers. I love the Chet, it's my favourite 'go to' guitar when I'm touring. The truth is though, it is a facsimile of a real acoustic guitar, but without the feedback issues, due to its solid body. The Ashdown amps imparted a more realistic acoustic tone than just going through a PA and monitors. Both amplifiers passed the rehearsal studio test with flying colours.

On the big stage the Jumbo really came to life. I used it as a monitor for my acoustic guitars by taking a line out from the back panel into the PA system. The controls on the Jumbo were effective, allowing me to get a good acoustic sound that I can't normally achieve via the traditional monitor route. All three guitars sounded great through this system, even at higher levels.

The Parlour wasn't designed to live its life in the fast lane of large concerts, although it holds its own in small venues, pubs and, of course in the parlour.

Overall, both amps performed extremely well and, bearing in mind their affordable price tags, are well worth consideration. ■

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Acoustic Magazine
August 2015

STRAHM EROS

Described as a 'hidden jewel' of the guitar-making world, Stephen Strahm is fast rising up the ranks of the world's best. On test here is an OM-esque model, so named for its alluring lines. Stephen Bennett prepares to be seduced

WORDS: STEPHEN BENNETT **IMAGES:** THE ACOUSTIC MUSIC COMPANY

In that essential (though still to be written) manual, *How To Write Heroic Fantasy*, there'll be an entire chapter devoted to the humble apprentice who secretly forges a mighty sword that will, one day, prove to be the finest in all the realm. Bay Area native, Stephen Strahm, is certainly humble when it comes to extolling the virtues of his magnificent, Martin OM-inspired, Eros acoustic. Nonetheless, it's only a matter of time before his work emerges to stand alongside that of the masters he's assisted and learned from over the years; the likes of Jeff Traugott, Rick Turner and Richard Hoover at the Santa Cruz Guitar Company.

It's snowing in England as Strahm, from an unseasonably-warm Monterey Bay, gives us the low-down on finally stepping out from the shadows to challenge the acoustic world under his own name.

Just as Michelangelo, faced with a big job like the Sistine Chapel, would have a back-up team to do the colouring in, so too do the high-end West Coast luthiers (Ervin Somogyi, Kathy Wingert, Michi Matsuda, Ray Kraut et al). When it comes to the precision, specialised finishing work that fully meets their exacting artistic vision, they need the kind of expert support they can trust from an artist/craftsman whose contribution will enhance their work rather than simply complete it. Addam Stark is one such. And working alongside him on the Great Luthier Pyramid; Stephen Strahm. Only now, Strahm's in at the beginning – from tree-trunk to tune-up.

The Eros model, so-named due to its voluptuous contours, was a much-talked-about stand-out at the Memphis Guitar Show in 2015. Not only did its design aesthetic reflect a major Jeff Traugott influence, so did its sound.

This particular example comes with beautifully figured, deep chocolatey Amazon rosewood back and sides offset by an almost ivory-white, Italian spruce top. It's a real looker: all narrow-waisted, sleek elegance

with just a hint of glamour in the crazy-paved marquetry of the headstock veneer. The soundhole rosette carries a deceptively simple, dolphin-fin motif that projects the subtle illusion of a clockwise rotating motion propelled by the player's right hand. Strahm began exploring his own graceful variations on the fin motif after being inspired by the madly brilliant, hybrid instruments of the legendary Fred Carlson and he's been developing it ever since.

The Eros is packed with the little design details that have become (individual nuances notwithstanding) the recognisable trademarks of the top West Coast builders: soft, cream coachlining on the fingerboard, the semi-squared-off, slightly upward sweeping heel (à la Traugott) and the tapering, logo-free headstock. The fretboard and bridge are of classic, none-more-black ebony – likewise the bindings and back-strip – while the nut is crafted in that fat, scalloped bone so familiar to Somogyi instruments. No one seems quite sure what the scalloping adds to the sound quality but it certainly looks cool. The bone saddle, meanwhile, remains scallop-free.

The mahogany neck has the look of gently ruffled cat's fur and feels about as smooth, while the 'de rigueur' Gotoh 510 tuners with their ebony buttons, round out a 'co-ordinated' look that's both tastefully restrained and ultra-contemporary. The only place Strahm has allowed himself a spot of playful indulgence is in the aforementioned elaborately-extravagant headstock veneer. Here, the patch-work marquetry is less angular than you'd find on the Traugott guitars that provide the inspiration. Strahm wanted something with "more flow" and a curviness in keeping with the overall "eroticism". And while it seems the influence of Charles Rennie Mackintosh clearly resonates as strongly in California as it does in Glasgow, Strahm himself sidesteps any grand artistic pretension by insisting that he has so many beautiful pieces of scrap wood lying around it would be a shame not to use them somewhere. And influences aside, Strahm's slipped in a few modifications of his own, including the little swoop right at the top that reflects the wave-breaking dolphin theme of the rosette.

The seldom-seen Amazon rosewood is an old batch Strahm picked up from a friend. He'd never worked with it before as it's so hard to come by these days but suffice to say it looks exactly like Brazilian, with its rich colouring and liquid grain, but is much denser. He also points out that because the tree variety has a particularly narrow girth, planks wide enough for a "large OM" back are rare indeed. Strahm's delighted that he's still got two more sets he can't wait to string up.

First impressions, sound-wise, are of an almost 'plays itself' responsiveness even to the lightest touch. This is a loud guitar without

STRAHM EROS

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Stephen Strahm
Model: Eros
RRP: £6,550
Body Size: OM-derivative
Made In: California, USA
Top: Italian spruce
Back and Sides: Amazon rosewood back and sides
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Honduran mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 21
Tuners: Gotoh 510
Nut Width: 1¾"
Scale Length: 25 3/8"
Onboard Electronics: None
Other: Bone nut and saddle
Case Included: G&G

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Flawless build, lines and tone
Cons: At the time of going to press, we're still looking for one
Overall: A genuine investment as Strahm's prices will rocket once word gets out

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Value for Money: ✪✪✪✪✪
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor

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a hint of brashness. Its sparkling, sleigh-bell brightness when strummed is underpinned by a rich, barrel-chested depth that perfectly serves the fingerstylist's need for clarity, separation, tonal warmth and across-the-board sustain. The Eros sounds like it feels: beautifully balanced.

It conjures an extra layer of sonic gravitas in dropped D and dons the full tonal fur coat in DADGAD. Strahm credits the guitar's big-voiced presence to that generous lower bout, sweeping so seductively wide from the narrow wasp-waist. That and a few other subtly nuanced, technical niceties, notably the floating back-brace that stands up off the back-plate of the instrument, only connecting to the other braces and so allowing the back to keep its shallow radius and resonate more freely. It's a system that also keeps the back from flattening out over time and helps prevent the need for neck re-sets from the neck-block having rotated inwards, raising the action and destabilising the saddle. And if all that sounds just too tiresomely technical, rest assured that Strahm – like so many of his perfectionist colleagues – only worries about it so we won't have to.

It's probably fair to say that backs play more of a role in tone, these days (at least at the high end), due to innovative bracing design, than they did 'back in the day'. Front can only get you so far, after all. Which may be a contributory factor in the Eros's individual string volume – up and down the fingerboard – being so amazingly even. Unlike some old dreadnoughts, there's no volume 'spike' that kicks the instrument into life around the fifth and seventh frets. The evenness here is remarkable. The Eros excels in that open-spaced, slow to mid-tempo fingerstyle range where it can summon all the stately grandeur of a Bill Evans or Keith Jarrett-driven grand piano. Albeit so much easier to carry around.

Strahm's primary focus is on producing ultra-high quality instruments but because he's not that well known (yet) he accepts that he comes to the market at a lower price-point than the bigger 'names'. Nonetheless, you'd struggle to match this quality at twice the cost – it's comfortable, curvaceously covetable and as fine a fingerstyle guitar as you'll find anywhere.

Stephen Strahm is utterly dedicated to his craft. He'll freely admit that a day spent away from his guitars feels like a day wasted. The eventual owner of this marvellous Eros may end up feeling the same way. Not just a beauty, then – this one's a bargain. ■

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THE PRETTY BOURGEOIS

Alison Richter speaks to Dana Bourgeois of Bourgeois Guitars on what it is to have success as a luthier in the 21st century

WORDS: ALISON RICHTER **IMAGES PROVIDED BY:** BOURGEOIS GUITARS

When musicians hear the name Bourgeois Guitars, founder and luthier Dana Bourgeois hopes that it goes beyond brand recognition. "I want the name to associate with a guitar that has a certain identity, but also a level of quality and integrity," he says. "We build what we believe is a fine guitar, as opposed to just making something that we can sell."

Now entering its 41st year, the company handcrafts an average of 400 guitars annually, which retail around $7,000. The instruments are, at best, a wish-list item for most guitarists, but you're likely to find a Bourgeois in the hands of collectors and an elite group of players such as Ricky Skaggs, Ry Cooder and Brian Sutton.

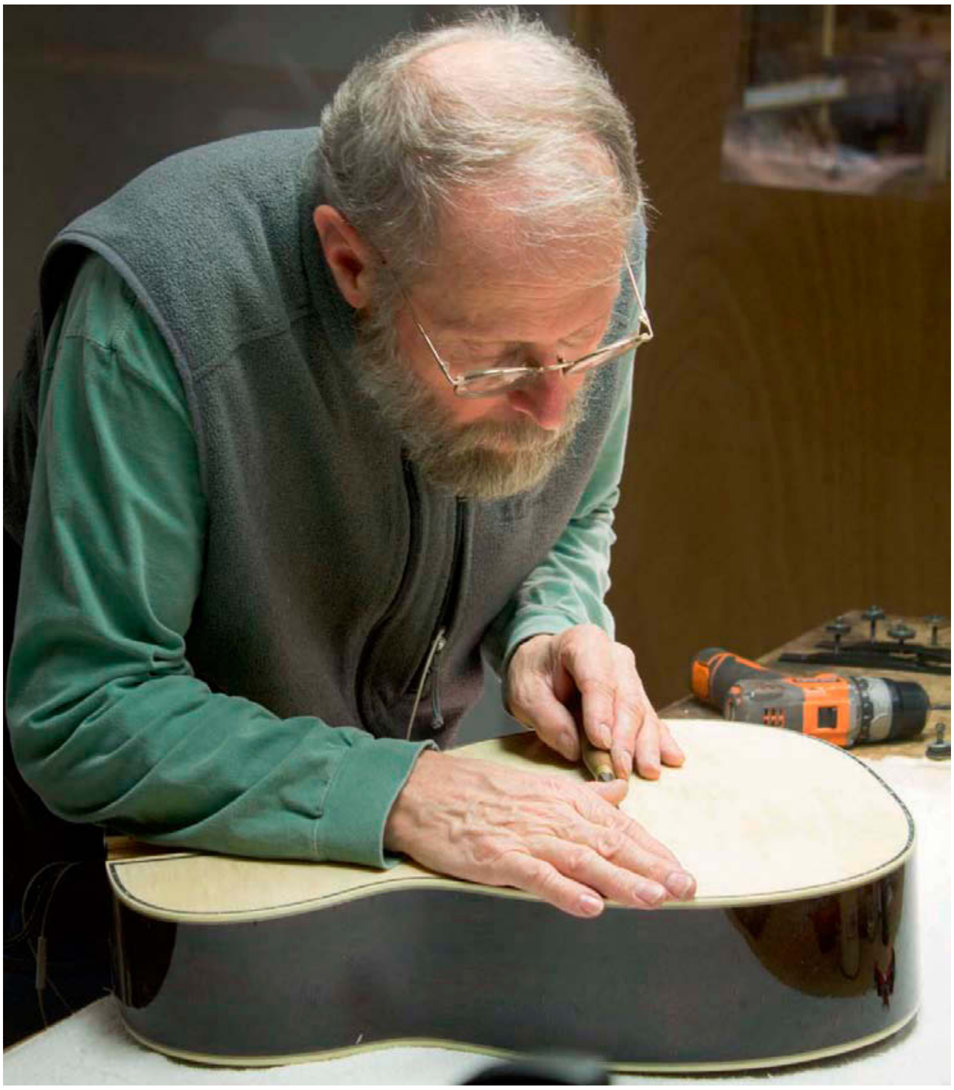
Dana Bourgeois' story begins like that of almost every person of a certain generation: as a youngster growing up in Maine he saw the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and it was a life-changing moment. He started playing guitar shortly after that, and began building guitars in his dorm room as a student at Bowdoin College in the early 1970s. By 1977, he had opened a shop and received his first commission. He made his living repairing and restoring guitars, while hand-building his own models.

"At that time, there was a very large market community of guitar players, but most of the major guitar companies were building the lowest-quality products of their entire history," he says. "The baby-boom generation took to playing guitar in the late 50s and early '60s, during the folk revival period, and it continued through the 60s with the growth of rock'n'roll and the Beatles. A lot of kids my age played guitar because it was the thing to do, so there was a large built-in market for guitars, yet the companies were building some of the worst products. A small subset of the legions who started playing guitar in the 60s and 70s developed an interest in building guitars, and some of my peers and I matured into a significant segment of the high end of the industry."

Housed in an old textile mill in Lewiston, Maine, with a 14-person staff, the company has remained steady in size. "Every year, we're a little bit more profitable because we're a little bit more efficient," says Bourgeois. "We don't build in a contemporary style. We build sort of a hybrid that's based mostly on pre-second world war classics updated with contemporary features. You always have to be a little bit ahead of the curve and put out something a little bit different from what you were building couple of years ago."

"Different" translated into "groundbreaking" when, several years ago, one of his suppliers of Canadian red spruce sent Dana some samples of torrefied wood – kiln-heated to artificially age the wood in order to burn off volatile sugars, oils, and resins that otherwise require decades to oxidise naturally. "The second I saw the samples, I could flex and tap the wood and feel that it was lighter and vibrated more freely," he says. "I built a couple of prototypes relatively quickly, and I became the first acoustic guitar manufacturer in this country to offer a torrefied guitar top. Now, pretty much all the major manufacturers are using torrefied wood. A number of electric guitar builders started using this material a few years prior to acoustic builders, but it's a fairly common thing, and it was gratifying to have the front end of that."

The company's identity has been built on the balance and clarity of their guitars' tones. "This is something that I trace back to my interest in acoustical physics and having developed a voicing process," he says. "Also, the guitars sound more broken in and a little more vintage than one would expect from a new guitar."



Bourgeois's voicing process is a meticulous one, based on top and back wood selection, flexibility, thickness and range of tap tones. With no internet, classes or how-to books when he became a luthier, it was trial and error at first. "It was every man for himself," he says. "There were a couple of books about construction, but they didn't tell you how to make a guitar sound a certain way. I did some research in the *Journal of the American Acoustical Society*, and there wasn't much about guitars, but there was quite a bit about violins, published by a Professor Frederick Saunders and his associate, Carleen Hutchins, who went on to found the Catgut Acoustical Society, which published a newsletter devoted to scientifically exploring the physics of violin. I immersed myself in a lot of that literature and tried to figure out how to apply it to guitars. My essential approach was to make as many different resonant frequencies as possible out of a guitar top, and learning how to hold and tap the tops in ways that you can actually hear a note and its major harmonics. Instead of having one big, strong harmonic, you want a bunch of reasonably placed and reasonably strong harmonics. If your harmonics peaks are spread out far enough, you'll have a guitar that has a good note-to-note and string-to-string balance. If you build enough guitars, you begin to figure out, 'For this particular model, there's a way that I can get to this place fairly quickly without stumbling in the dark.'"

The guitars all feature bolt-on necks, rather than traditional dovetailed joints. Bourgeois determined a necessity for detachable necks in the 1980s, when a majority of his work came from guitar restoration, particularly on pre-1939 instruments, which, at the time, were sold in music stores and often needed repairs. "One of the more common problems with an old guitar is the need for a neck reset," he says. "If you build in a traditional style, with traditional bracing, the force of the string wants to fold the top up around the sound hole. The sound hole is a weak spot in the top, so the whole upper end of the guitar, including the neck, pitches into the sound hole, and the strings will rise off the fretboard. It's a traumatic experience with a glued-in dovetail neck, especially on an expensive guitar, to take that neck out, reset it at a different angle, and make it look like it never happened."

"From the experience of having to execute that repair, when I went into production I realised that if my necks ever need to be reset, I'm probably going to be the guy who has to do a lot of them, so it had better be easy! I started thinking about how to design necks. Other people had made bolt-on necks, but the fretboard was glued on. I wanted a method of fitting a neck that didn't involve gluing the fretboard."

To ensure tone and durability, each neck is equipped with a double-action truss rod. "As soon as I became acquainted with double-action rods, I realised that you want to build in as much ingestibility as possible for the player, or for a guitar tech, so they don't have to come back," he says. "Truss rods can change the sound of a guitar a lot, and I've tried a lot of them. Our truss rods are made out of steel, as opposed to aluminum, and are reinforced with a thin sliver of graphite on either side, which gives a little more rigidity to the neck, the idea being you can adjust the neck to whatever shape you want, but when you're done turning the nut, it will stay there. If you try to flex it with extra force with your hand, it takes a lot of effort to move it. That's good for tone. You don't want your neck vibrating. When you pluck the string, the vibration moves out in both directions. It moves toward the head of the guitar and it moves down to the bridge. If the neck moves – if the neck

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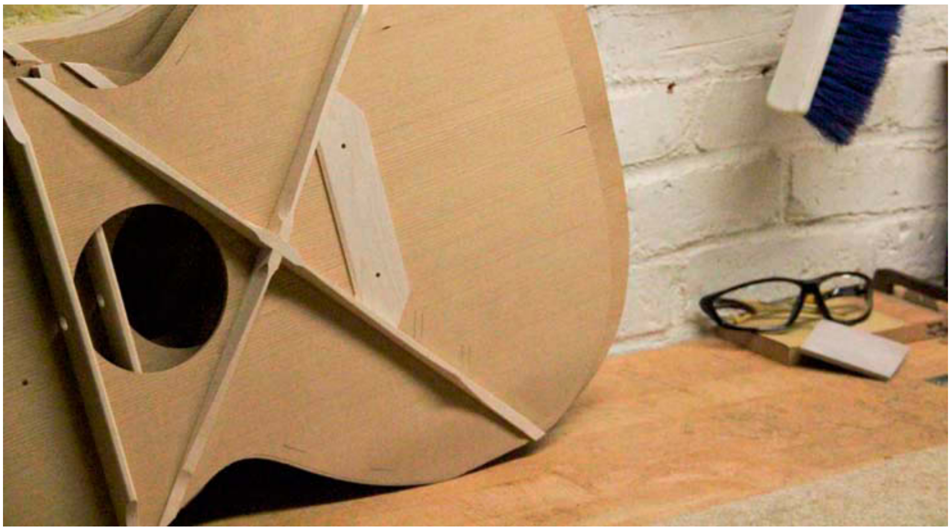

actually physically vibrates – it's going to rob energy that could otherwise drive your top, so a rigid but adjustable neck is desirable."

Thanks to what he calls "a whole sub-industry of tonewood suppliers," Bourgeois guitars are available in multiple variations for tops, backs and sides, including spruce, mahogany, koa, rosewood, maple and walnut. "Many of the suppliers I use are connections I built up over the years," he says. "I always try to have a second source for everything, just in case supplies are low at any one time. There have been times when a new tonewood is really interesting and one of the bigger companies will buy everything that's available on the market, so it can be tough to compete. There have been shortages in the past. Back before the Great Recession, the big thing in the market was exotic wood. If you could come up with a new wood that sounded amazing and had a name that no one had ever heard of, that was the easiest way to sell a guitar. Since the recession, things have retracted back to the older, tried and true tonewoods. They seem to be what's important right now and what people are interested in."

"We buy mahogany from a company in Maine that specialises in wooden boat-building materials, so when they get in three-inch mahogany boards, we get to look at them. The boards can be 20 feet long, 60 inches wide, 3 inches thick, and make a lot of guitar necks. Most tops and backs we buy already sawn and processed for guitar sets; the same with fretboards and bridges.

"Brazilian rosewood is very difficult to get. Probably, at some point, even if you acquire legal Brazilian rosewood, you won't be able to sell it, so we will be phasing it out. When the ban on trade of all ivory products in the US came out, if you owned a Steinway piano with ivory keys, you couldn't sell it. Then exceptions were made for antiques. The same thing will happen with Brazilian rosewood. It's part of the ongoing environmental movement, which I certainly support. It's been illegal to cut Brazilian rosewood since 1993. The Brazilian rosewood that we buy is certified by CITES [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora]. It was processed and harvested before 1993, and there is new rosewood available, but at this point we're going to draw down our existing stocks and probably not buy any more."

Over the course of four decades, the accolades are many, but for Dana Bourgeois, success is measured by more than personal accomplishments. "Somehow I've managed to make a living in southern Maine, which is where I grew up, doing what I want to do, which is building guitars, and staying close to musicians. I'm a music fanatic, so that's a great achievement," he says. "I used to think this whole thing was about me, and then all of a sudden we lost 30 per cent of our market overnight. We managed to go into the recession and come out of it without having to lay anyone off or cut their hours. We lost money, but we kept the same number of cars in the parking lot, and we kept people working, and I had a realisation that it's not about me. There's a whole community of employees whose skills and dedication have gone into making this business, this company, what it is. Keeping them all employed throughout that scary economic period – I look at that as another achievement. I haven't even mentioned guitars, have I? Add that to the other things that I'm proud of – going to a concert and watching a top-notch guitarist play my guitars. It doesn't get any better than that, and fortunately, I've had a few of them." ■

Bourgeois Guitars are available in the UK via GuitarGuitar, The North American Guitar and Ivor Mairants.

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1935 C.F. MARTIN 0-17

Tony Werneke of Replay Acoustics looks at an underappreciated pre-war gem from C.F. Martin & Co

IMAGES: MATT SMITH

The 15 and 17 series of Martin guitars have been somewhat shunned as the less desirable bottom end of Martin's production during the pre- and post-war years. It is true that they were the least expensive line that Martin made, up through the 1960s, but they never should have been looked down upon as something lesser.

Contrary to belief, and true to Martin's dedication to their business principles, these little guitars with the brown tops were made as precisely and with as much attention to craftsmanship and quality as any other Martin guitar of their day.

Let's get some background: the 0-15 was Martin's absolute least expensive model, first appearing in 1935 as Martin's answer to the financial limitations presented by the Great Depression. The 14-fret 0-15 was only ever produced as an 0 model. It was made between 1935 and 1961 with a short halt to production during 1944-47. It featured a solid mahogany top, sides and back with no binding and a very simple black, white, black soundhole inlay. The board and rectangular bridge were rosewood and the fret inlays were single dots at the fifth, seventh, ninth and 12th positions. The finish was a thinner mahogany stain under a semi-gloss cellulose finish.

As for the 17 series, production of this mahogany topped series began in 1922 only as a 2-17 model. It wasn't until 1934 that we see the 14-fret 0 and 00 models enter production on a catalogue basis.

With a solid mahogany top, rims and back and a rosewood board and rectangular bridge, the 17 model differed from the 0-15 model by having double dots at the seventh and 12th positions, along with a glossier finish over a dark brown walnut-coloured stain. It still had no bindings at the edges and carried the same black, white, black soundhole inlays.

Now back to our 1935 0-17. The much coveted secret about this guitar is its pre-war heritage. The post-war examples are wonderful guitars and have matured to the point where their sound has opened up to become really rewarding. But the pre-war examples are a different kettle of fish all together. They are every bit as good as their spruce topped cousins and offer a completely different sound and feel.

Firstly, the pre-war examples are all scallop braced, much like the spruce topped guitars from the same era. This alone is a feature that would catapult them into a completely different league relative to the post-war examples where the bracing becomes flat topped. Combine two scalloped tone bars with small maple bridge plates, super slim X-bracing and wafer thin mahogany tops and you get a guitar that is crisp, loud and responsive. They hold a lovely sustain and possess the great haunting back tones that we all love.

Surprisingly, they also have the standard tuner of the day, not some cheaper

"Combine two scalloped tone bars with small maple bridge plates, super slim X-bracing and wafer thin mahogany tops and you get a guitar that is crisp, loud and responsive… with a lovely sustain and the haunting back tones that we love"

example. Nickel plated buttons and plates with 6:1 ratios make for great and accurate tuning and provide further testament to Martin's unwillingness to compromise quality for profit.

Where Martin saved money was in places that had no bearing on the quality of sound – and they are still a bit of a sleeper relative to their spruce topped cousins. With the current trend toward small-bodied guitars, the pre-war Martin 15 and 17 series are true classic heavyweights in their category and are more relevant than ever. They provide the contemporary player with a sound that is ancient and contemporary – providing a true variant on the traditional spruce topped models that these are often compared with. We see in the contemporary guitar market of today that Martin and many other makers have "looked back" in an attempt to recreate and honor the pre-war mahogany topped beauties of that era. Nothing, however, will ever replace the real thing. ■

Steve Fairclough is a veteran of the UK fingerstyle guitar scene. Throughout the 1990s he was the demonstrator for Takamine and Parker Guitars working across Europe and the USA on a steady diet of tours, clinics and concert shows that brought him many accolades as a 'guitarist's guitarist'. Since then he has worked as a clinician for many fine instruments such as Breedlove and Alvarez and he has his own brand of Fairclough guitars.

Steve is currently the European ambassador for Fishman Inspired Performance Technology.

CAPTURING **YOUR TONE**

European Fishman ambassador and UK fingerstyle legend Steve Fairclough doles out his hard-earned advice on recording your acoustic instrument on a budget

WORDS: STEVE FAIRCLOUGH IN ASSOCIATION WITH FISHMAN

In this series, I'm going to run you through my thoughts on capturing the tone and essence of your acoustic instrument. It's particularly aimed at those of you who can't yet afford a big studio and a team of engineers. Before access to the internet was so widespread, if you wanted to find out anything about a certain brand of guitar, you would come along to clinics and demonstrations, usually hosted by your local music store in a variety of settings.

I mention this only because back in the early '90s, for seven years of my life, I attempted to get acoustic guitars to sound 'right' in every type of venue, from chicken sheds to church halls, and curry houses to stately homes. So if you're having problems, it's safe to say I have also been there, and, having bought the T-shirt, I am here to offer you some advice.

Let's start with recording an acoustic guitar. In this piece we can look at some simple rules and concepts that should ensure you get the best recording possible.

The first thing to remember is that if you get a good initial recording, it saves the amount of processing you have to do at the mix down stage – and this is a jolly good thing.

Acoustic guitars are sometimes referred to by engineers as 'jangle boxes', and with good reason. As a rule they send out frequencies from all over the place,

and the sound a listener hears when they stand in front of a live acoustic player is a combination of all those different frequencies at once.

Which, as an added note, is why when purchasing an acoustic guitar, you should always have someone play the instrument with you stood in front of it. The sound from the player's perspective is never what the audience hears.

One of the first things to consider is the guitar itself. Make sure it sounds as good as it can before you even begin to record it. Does it need new strings? Is it properly in tune? This sounds a dumb thing to say, but if this is your one chance at getting your stuff down properly, so give yourself a fighting chance.

Is there any chance of borrowing a better guitar for the recording? It sounds simple, but it's important: if the guitar doesn't sound right before you start, it's unlikely to get any better later on.

Once you have the best sounding instrument you can get, take a look around you. What is the room doing to the sound? Is it an expansive room that allows natural reverb and an airy 'live' feel, or is it a small bedroom filled with duvets, pillows and curtains that will swallow all the signal and leave you with a flat, dead sound going into the mic? Again, these are hugely important considerations. If you capture the sound of a cathedral echo as part of your recording, it's difficult to get rid of it later on.

Generally speaking the best microphone for the job will be a condenser mic. They are much better at handling the higher end frequencies that an acoustic guitar puts out. The next decision is whether to use a mic with an omni pattern or a cardioid pattern. The omni pattern will be much better at picking up both the guitar and the sound of the room, whereas the cardioid will take much more of the guitar, and is therefore a good choice for a smaller room.

I refer back at this point to my earlier statement: do you have the best mics possible for the job? If not, can you borrow some, or even hire a couple for the day?

I won't risk the wrath of a thousand engineers by definitively stating which mics are the best, but some mics are just better than others, and some have earned their reputation as industry stalwarts.

There have been millions of pages written about mic placement, and in truth it's one of those esoteric arts that each engineer will have their own theories about. However, there are a couple of simple rules that apply to almost every situation.

Most of us are familiar with seeing the image of a guitar player on stage, with a microphone placed very close to the sound hole, but miking on stage is a different art to miking in the studio. In the studio, you have the luxury of trying different mic positions, capturing a mixture of the guitar and the room, and I recommend you take some time to do this.

If you place the mic too far away from the guitar, you risk recording too much room noise, you lose high end definition and run the risk of increased noise from the mic preamp as you raise the gain. If you place the mic too close to the guitar, you lose the feel of the room, which in some cases can be a blessing, but again this depends on where you're working. Usually a bit of 'air' is no bad thing.

Usually you will find a sweet spot in every location, where the blend between the two is best, but as a start, I would recommend aiming the microphone at the point where the neck joins the body. As a general rule, the closer you get to the sound hole, the warmer the sound, and as you move nearer the neck you get a more treble-based signal. As regards the distance, this will depend on all sorts of factors including how hard the guitarist is playing and whether he's using a pick or fingers, but start around a foot away and listen to how the sound varies as you move closer or further away.

It's at this point, that a set of decent headphones can be invaluable. With them, you'll be able to hear in real time the effect of mic placement, and you'll be able to judge much more accurately where the sweet spot lies.

Finally, remember that guitarists are a varied bunch: one will sit beautifully still and play accurately with the minimum amount of fuss, while another will flail about wildly, creating creaks from the stool and having his hands squeak up and down the strings. It's your job to capture the performance complete with all its nuances. ■

TIPS & TRICKS

Sometimes, bedrooms or living rooms can be 'dead' environments. If this is the case with your room, try putting a couple of sheets of 3x5' plywood them in front and around a guitarist to allow the sound to reflect off the shiny side, and with some judicious moving and listening, this will have a big effect on your recorded sound.

You could also try Nashville tuning. Replace the bottom three strings of the guitar (the thick ones!) with another set of top strings. You can then tune the 'new' bottom three strings a full octave above where they should be. Quite useful for recording second parts to complement the original.

Try double tracking an acoustic part with a take recorded on an Alto guitar.

Finally, I should add that Fishman produce a range of pre-amps and pedals that are all built to help you achieve the guitar tone you desire. The Fishman Aura Spectrum pedal is a favourite of mine if I'm trying to achieve a top studio sound on a budget.

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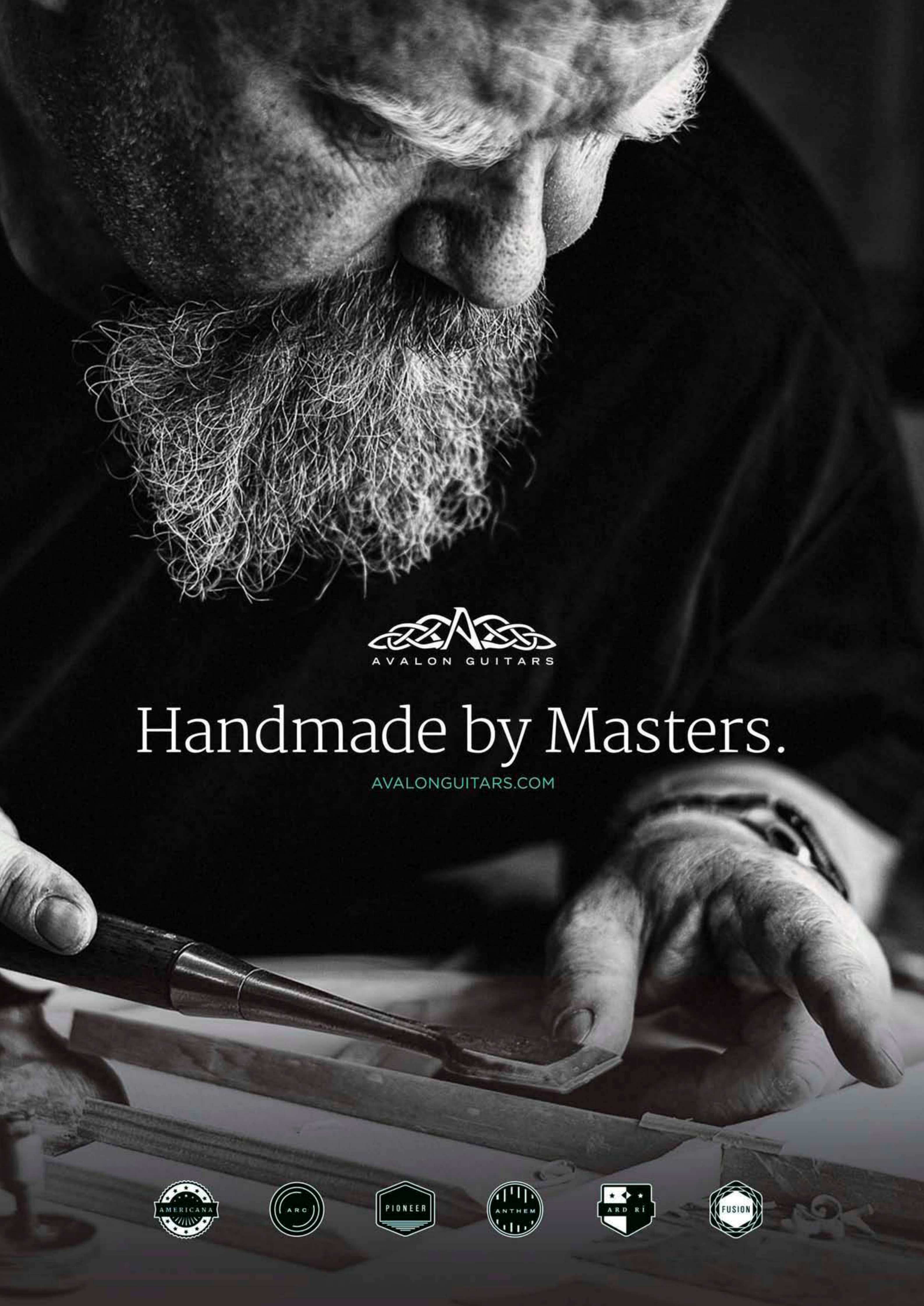
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IAN ETHAN

STYLE… (ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTAL)

I grew up in rural areas of the US – New Hampshire, California and Vermont – but I am about to go on the road full-time with my wife and sound engineer Stephanie Case. I have no allegiance to any musical genre – I listen for the ideas that come to me and execute them as accurately as I can. For me, the best tool for that is an 18-string double-neck acoustic guitar. Sometimes I incorporate a fretless guitar and use several live loopers simultaneously to expand that further. I came across my first Ovation double-neck 18-string acoustic during the few years that they made them, and it became the main thing for me because it's the most efficient means I've found to play what I'm hearing in my head. When I play live, my rig involves a 32-channel iPad-controlled mixer, two Boss RC-300 loopers, a laptop running a Lexicon-based reverb plug-in chain, DI boxes for the different instrument outputs, and a couple of effects – a Boss OC-3 sub octave and a Boss WP-20G wave processor. I have two double-necks – "The Brick" which is a standard Ovation double-neck with a few customised upgrades, and "The Butter". That used to be an off-the-shelf Ovation double-neck until I put baritone strings on it and it folded up from the tension. So I had my luthier put a new top on it, and when I got it back it was like a different instrument. The track 'Butter II' [featured on *Acoustic Presents… Vol 10*], is the second song that came to me after I got it back from him. It's taken from my latest album *Run Towards The Mountains*, which was released last year. My next album is now underway. It will be more of a group thing, with musicians I've been fortunate to connect with over the past years; a lot of really established guys who are older and more experienced than me, but also a few amazing young musicians who are just as incredible.

www.ianethan.com

ANNA PANCALDI

STYLE… (FOLK POP)

I'm a singer-songwriter, based in London. I learned a great deal from my first EP, *Black Tears*, discovering how best to portray myself on record. I've just released my second EP, *Dear Joey*, which represents a progression, and really shows who I am as an artist. I wanted to dedicate my next two EPs to my siblings, the people I love the most. The songs are almost like letters to them, so I've started with *Dear Joey*, dedicated to my brother. 'Runaway' is the first single to be taken from the EP. It's about when your life comes to a standstill and everyone around you carries on as if nothing happened at all. My favourite track, 'Come On Love', was written for my sister, as an encouragement through life's trials. I feel an acoustic guitar is the best accompaniment for my songs, which are inspired by the things in life that have impacted me most. I love to pick and strum. Dynamics are key in a song to take people on a journey. Sometimes I have lyrics ready beforehand, but for the most part I sit down with my guitar and improvise. I use DADGAD almost more than standard tuning now – I love the different melodies and songs working in another tuning inspires. My regular guitar, and my favourite, is a concert-sized Breedlove AJ250/SM electro-acoustic with a solid Sitka spruce top and mahogany back and sides. I've had it since about 2009, it's beautiful and it's been on my entire musical journey so far, so I have a fondness for it. I have a little Martin too, and an even smaller guitar I took travelling to write on for nine months, but my Breedlove takes first place. I'm keeping my set-up simple for the moment. I've everything to prove to people while I'm in the early grafting stages, so it's DI via the PA for me. I'm touring the US in June and July and I'm hugely excited about it.

www.annapancaldi.com

NED MORTIMER

STYLE… (INDIE FOLK)

I sing and play nylon-strung acoustic guitar with indie folk trio August and After alongside Vedantha Kumar (vocals, steel-strung acoustic guitar) and Jordan Bergmans (vocals, viola). The group's name was inspired by the title of Counting Crows' debut album. We're based in London now, though Vedantha and I met in Cambridge, while Jordan is from France. Our songs are underpinned by interwoven guitars, viola and three-part harmonies, around which we create instrumental soundscapes with electric guitar, percussion and synth. On our *Cascades* EP, which came out in March, we wanted to explore our different styles of songwriting and arrangement. The songs focus on human connection, our experiences of different relationships and the varied emotions around them. We're all proud of the lead single, 'Wolves', which depicts the divergence between inward emotion and outward expression. Most of my songs start with a guitar line or chord sequence, though I'll have an idea of a theme. Then I work on a melody and lyrics. I used to use alternate tunings a lot more than I do now, but I'm writing a new song with a DADGAE tuning and then a first fret capo, creating a really warm feel. I currently play a nylon-strung Cordoba GK Studio Negra electro classical guitar with an amazing Fishman Presys Blend pick-up. I switch between fingerpicking and a palm-muted strumming style, and the Cordoba rings beautifully for both styles of playing. It has an incredibly soft touch and gentle sound. I DI, adjusting the pick-up for the space we're playing in. Future plans? We're excited with the production style on *Cascades*, so we're working on new songs to explore this sound. We're also doing more and more in Europe, having built up loyal fan-bases in France and Italy, and our next big UK show will be in London in late May.

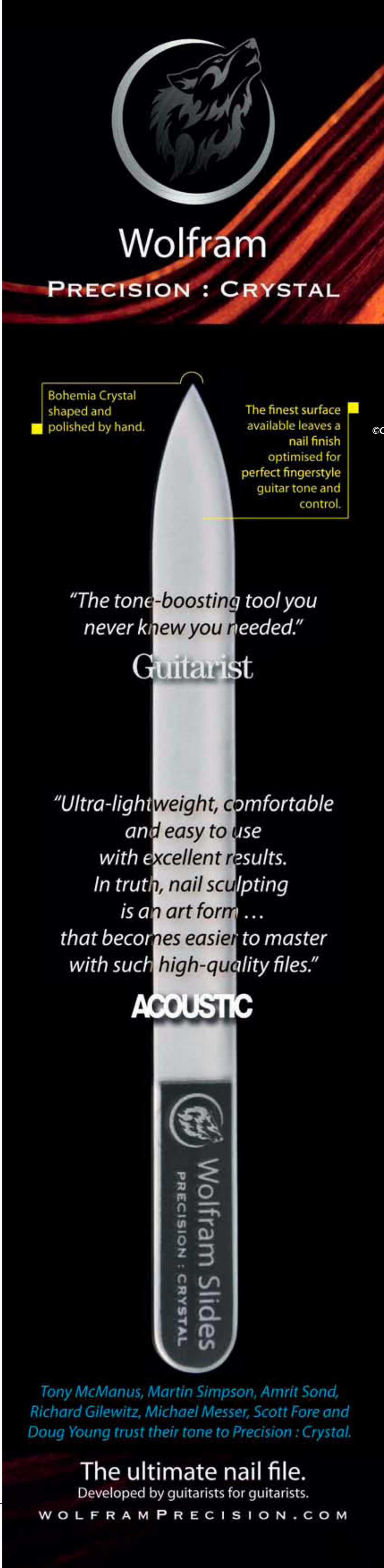
www.augustandafter.co.uk

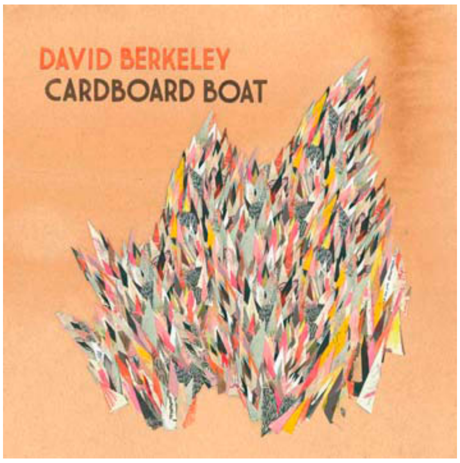
LESLEY PIKE

STYLE… (ROOTS ROCK AND POP)

I'm a Canadian singer-songwriter living in Toronto, My songs are personal and focused on relationships – not just in the romantic sense, but all relationships. On my latest album, *November*, there's a song about a former manager, one about my relationship with myself, and a few heart-wrenchers and love songs. I am a sucker for a ballad, so 'In Another Life' is a big favourite. I affectionately refer to the title track as my 'little Canadian love song', joking that if you can get through a Canadian winter with someone, you can get through anything. It's about the kind of love that digs in and sticks around when things get tough. My favourite memory of recording the album? The magic of playing with such incredible musicians – my producer James Bryan is my acoustic guitar hero, not just for his skill and talent, but also his creativity and the energy he brings to his playing. Having Ryan Kelly in to write and sing on 'Every Time We Say Goodbye' was definitely a highlight, too. Every song on *November* was originally written on acoustic guitar. I am currently obsessed with the Gibson LG-2 American Eagle acoustic, though my regular go-to for the past couple of years has been my 1948 Gibson ES-125 – the sound is so full and gritty. I usually go through a Boss tuner and have occasionally used a Boss loop station. My other regular was a Gibson Advanced Jumbo Anniversary Edition, which sadly was stolen recently, so the fine folks at Gibson have been loaning me various models to test drive, including the LG-2, J-185, L-200, and J-45. I love the LG-2 because it has a small body and a big warm sound. It feels great to hold, and as someone who does a fair bit of fingerstyle picking as well as strumming, I find it suits both. I am currently writing, working on material for a film and preparing to tour the US and UK in the spring and summer.

www.lesleypike.com





DAVID BERKELEY

CARDBOARD BOAT

WWW.DAVIDBERKELEY.COM

The sixth album from nomadic troubadour David Berkeley, finds him singing 10 cleverly thought out vignettes, designed to complement stories from his latest novella. Boasting some atmospheric and wonderfully arranged instrumentation, Berkely's vocals are oddly reminiscent of Michael Stipe and Cat Stevens. When he sings 'I've Got A Hole In My Heart' you can't help but want to comfort the lad and assure him it'll all work out fine. But then he's off again, singing about there being a 'brighter day', and dinosaurs and sages. Without the book, it's all a bit perplexing, and what it's all about is anyone's guess. But you can't help being impressed. **JP**

AUSTIN LUCAS

BETWEEN THE MOON & THE MIDWEST

WWW.AUSTINLUCASMUSIC.COM

If you caught one of Austin's recent solo shows, this album might come as something of a surprise. Backed up by a gang of kicking Nashville musicians, songs like 'Unbroken Hearts', a tale of his own ups and downs with the music city's A&R moguls, come into sharp relief. 'I've been told to walk away, nearly every time I make an album', a sentiment that many musicians will share. And you do wonder why, because this is a great album. Austin has one of those dusty, whisky drenched voices that comes into its own on quiet ballads like the sentimental 'Pray For Rain', complete with weeping pedal steel. Back-porch new-country doesn't get much better. **JP**

BEN MAGGS

COME AS YOU ARE

WWW.BENMAGGSMUSIC.COM

Ben Maggs admits this debut album has been a long time in the making, which is probably why the results are so impressive. From the urgent pleading of 'The Storm', powered by Ben's acoustic guitar and empathetic backing from, among others, members of the Budapest Café Orchestra, there's no chance for the listener to turn away. One of those albums that intrigue with each twist and turn, from the stop-go breaks in 'The Traveller's Song' to the driving 'Bread Of Life', he fashions an amazing intimacy – no mean feat. **JP**

STEVE DAWSON

SOLID STATES & LOOSE ENDS

WWW.STEVEDAWSON.CA

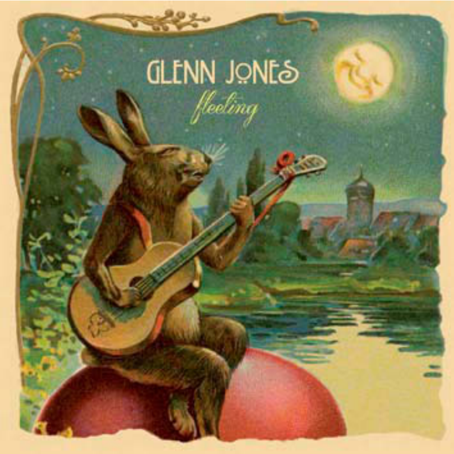
Canada's answer to Ry Cooder bounces back with a stunning collection of tracks, proving that there's not much he can't turn his hand to. A superb slide guitarist, he's equally at home coming up with dense sludgy licks behind the soulful 'Loose Ends', mind bogglingly fast fills on 'Broken Future Blues', and romping National steel workouts. Distilling the influences of musicians as disparate as Blind Willie McTell and soulman Joe Tex, the end result is an album that might just be the finest album Ry never got around to recording. A gem. **JP**

GARY LUTTON
DEPARTURE
WWW.GARYLUTTON.COM

Belfast guitarist Gary Lutton has an impressive string of achievements to his name, including winning the 2015 Sky Arts *Guitar Star* competition. And from the opening bars of 'Slipstream' it's easy to see why; his mastery of the guitar is consummate, a bewilderingly complex mix of harmonics and tapping underlying a haunting modal instrumental. It's a formula he repeats for the remaining three tracks of this debut EP, but it's when he forgoes the tapping to concentrate on the melody of 'Slow Blink' that the purity of his playing shines. **JP**

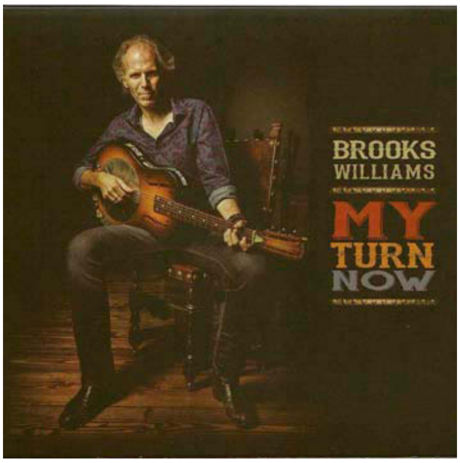
KEV MINNEY
ALL YOU NEED
WWW.KEVMINNEY.CO.UK

Brighton-based folk singer Kev Minney comes up with five self penned songs on this EP, all backed up by his simple but tasteful acoustic guitar playing. For the most part courageously sparse and stripped down, things tend to drift along a little, but Kev finally becomes emotionally engaged on 'Try A Little Harder'; it's not Wilson Pickett but there's a lot of soul there. And with Jerry Cronin's sonorous cello in the background, the closing song 'Have No Fear', establishes a shift of mood with flashes of unexpected intrigue. **JP**



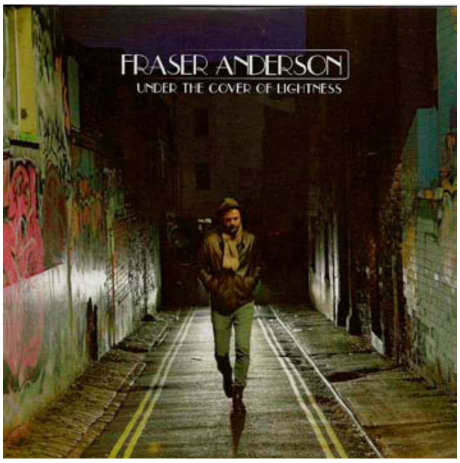
GLENN JONES
FLEETING
WWW.THRILLJOCKEY.COM

John Fahey's got a lot to answer for, and 50 or so years after he gestated the notion of 'Primitive Guitar', the form is alive and kicking in the hands of Glenn Jones. Recorded on the banks of Rancocas Creek, New Jersey, Glenn steers the listener through an entrancing bunch of soundscapes ranging from the clattering banjo led 'Spokane River Falls', the delicate shimmering 'Mother's Day' and the strange wiry 'Close To The Ground', recalling an unexpected night on the streets of Utrecht, with our own Michael Chapman. Maybe lacking the flashes of aggression sometimes found in Fahey, but a great album – if you like this kind of stuff. **JP**



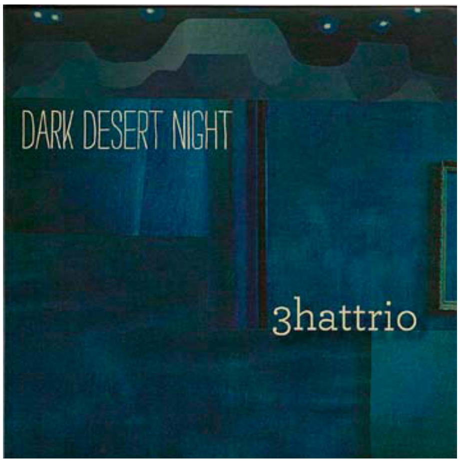
BROOKS WILLIAMS
MY TURN NOW
WWW.BROOKSWILLIAMS.COM

Lounging back on an old leather chair wrapped around his brown National, the gloomy CD cover shot of Brooks could have been a Son House pose half a century ago. And certainly the blues is the heartbeat of much of what Brooks gets up to here. Backed up by a muscular rhythm section, his jumping take of Mose Allison's classic 'Your Mind Is On Vacation', is an inspired choice, as is his loose limbed reworking of the traditional 'Hesitation Blues.' And throughout Brooks' guitar work is on the nail. If there's any gripes to be found… maybe a bit more dirt under the smooth surface wouldn't go amiss, but heck, you can't have everything. **JP**



FRASER ANDERSON
UNDER THE COVER OF LIGHTNESS
WWW.FRASERANDERSON.COM

Maybe in years to come people will refer to a 'Bristol sound' much as we mention the hallowed grounds of Memphis and New Orleans studios? Fraser Anderson is an émigré Scotsman holed up in Bristol, and the moody Portishead influence on 'Beautiful Eyes', boasting a languid rhythm with sparse drops of echoing keyboard hanging in the air, has that familiar resonance. Which is strange, because what follows is very much Fraser's own. His half whispered vocals weave in and out of the mix on a batch of songs that never break out of second gear, but are all imbued with a captivating grace, and at times oddly reminiscent of John Martyn. And that's no bad thing. **JP**



3HATTRIO
DARK DESERT NIGHT
WWW.3HATTRIO.COM

Beaming in from the deserts of southern Utah, this bunch of renegades describe their music as American desert music. So it's unexpected that two tracks in, they come up with an old English murder ballad, the lilting 'Carry Me Away', Hal Cannon's jangling banjo the bedrock of a song that sounds strangely more Upminster than Utah. But from there on in it's all sparse instrumentation and flashes of beauty in original songs – like the nakedly emotional 'Get On The Bus' – all carried by gruff vocals and slow contemplative arrangements. Together it creates an ethereal magic that puts them in a field of one. **JP**

KACY & CLAYTON

STRANGE COUNTRY

WWW.KACYANDCLAYTON.COM

Far from being 'strange', the sound this pair of young Canadian cousins create is only too familiar – it's as though they've stepped right out of a 60s English Topic Records folk compilation. Like a resurrected Sandy Denny or Linda Thompson – who just happens to be a big fan – Kacy Anderson's pure crystal voice is well to the fore in a mix that is also a blast from the past . A joyous blast of wheezing melodeon cuts in behind the jaunty 'Down At The Dancehall', drummer Lucas Goetz creating one those kind of knockabout rhythms the Fairports used so successfully, and somehow they even breathe new oxygen into an old chestnut like 'Seven Yellow Gypsies'. **JP**

BONNIE RAITT

DIG IN DEEP

WWW.BONNIERAITT.COM

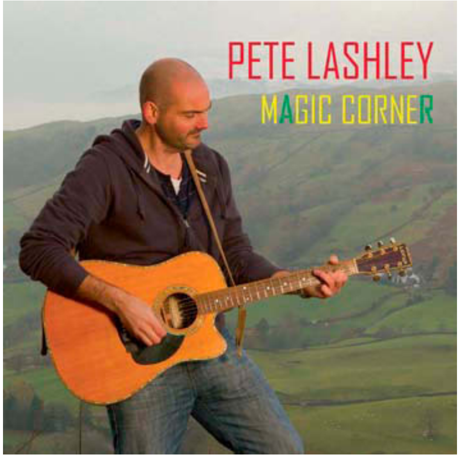
As artists 'mature' in the span of their careers, too often the arrival of a new album signifies a sharp intake of breath, as you wonder why the heck they still bother. But no one could throw such an accusation at Ms Raitt. She's a performer always guaranteed to deliver a dazzling live show and come up with great albums. And she's done it again now. From the instant her slide guitar sneaks into the introduction of 'Unintended Consequences Of Love', backed up by her sizzling road band, Bonnie romps through the 12 tracks in a way that sets a gold standard in both longevity and creativity. Long may she reign. **JP**

SHEL

JUST CRAZY ENOUGH

WWW.SHELMUSIC.COM

The four talented Holbrook sisters were raised in a Colorado trailer park, and between them play violin, guitar, keyboards, mandolin, banjo, guitar and drums. Quite where they're coming from is difficult to pin down, shades of folk, indie and pop all lurk in their songs, but as you drift away listening to Eva Holbrook dreamily asking 'What does this fool know anyway?', her mandolin gently tinkling behind her, it really doesn't matter. It's one of those albums that you explore knowing that the odds are that it'll just go on getting better. And it does. You'll probably hear their alluring and original songs at Glastonbury soon. Stunning. **JP**



PETE LASHLEY

MAGIC CORNER

WWW.PETELASHLEY.COM

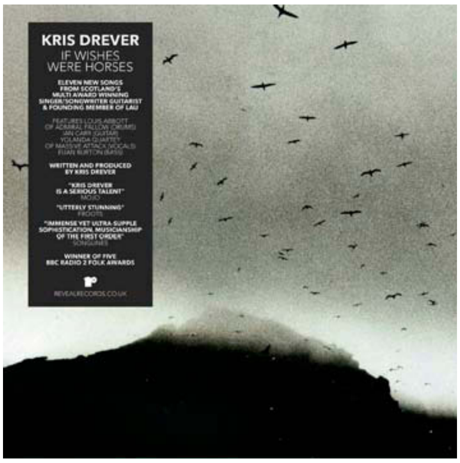
Lakeland based singer Pete Lashley, as this album bears out, is clearly a man happy in his environment. When Pete sings about the 'sunlight in the morning' or dreamily recalls the summer of 1976 in '76 It Was Hot', there's a charm about his songs, and lack of pretension, that in an often introspective singer/songwriter world, is a welcome blast of fresh air. And it's an interesting mix, William Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud' is given an intriguing folk treatment, and the haunting instrumental 'Sur La Cure', is just the type of melody you'd enjoy hearing as the mist clears from Helvellyn. **JP**

SAM CARTER

HOW THE CITY SINGS

WWW.SAMCARTERMUSIC.CO.UK

Sam Carter's always produced sad windswept songs, so no surprise that 'From The South Bank To Soho', the first track on this album, is an anguished tale of unrequited love. And it's a great one, Sam Sweeney adding dashes of silky cello, behind the mesh of Sam's yearning vocals and acoustic guitar. But it leaves you totally unprepared for the electric crash bang wallop of what follows, Sam moaning about 'Dark Days Being On Us Again'. Sam's at his best alone with his acoustic guitar, such as on the Nick Jones-inflected 'One Kind Of Harmony'. There're many flashes of beauty here, but ultimately it's pretty perplexing. **JP**



KRIS DREVER

IF WISHES WERE HORSES

WWW.KRISDREVER.COM

Since forming Lau, arguably one of the most progressive outfits on the British folk scene, it's been six years since Kris Drever last recorded a solo album. Now this set of semi-biographical songs, with second guitarist Ian Carr on hand, stems from his relocating to the windswept Shetland Isles. And as we've come to expect, the Drever magic is in full flow, wonderful heartfelt songs and exemplary guitar playing. Highlights include the rolling 'Shipwrecked', the haunting title track and 'Going To The North', a strangely uplifting song full of references to 'whistling wind' and 'the magnet in the north', Kris's hurried guitar suggesting he can't wait to get back. **JP**

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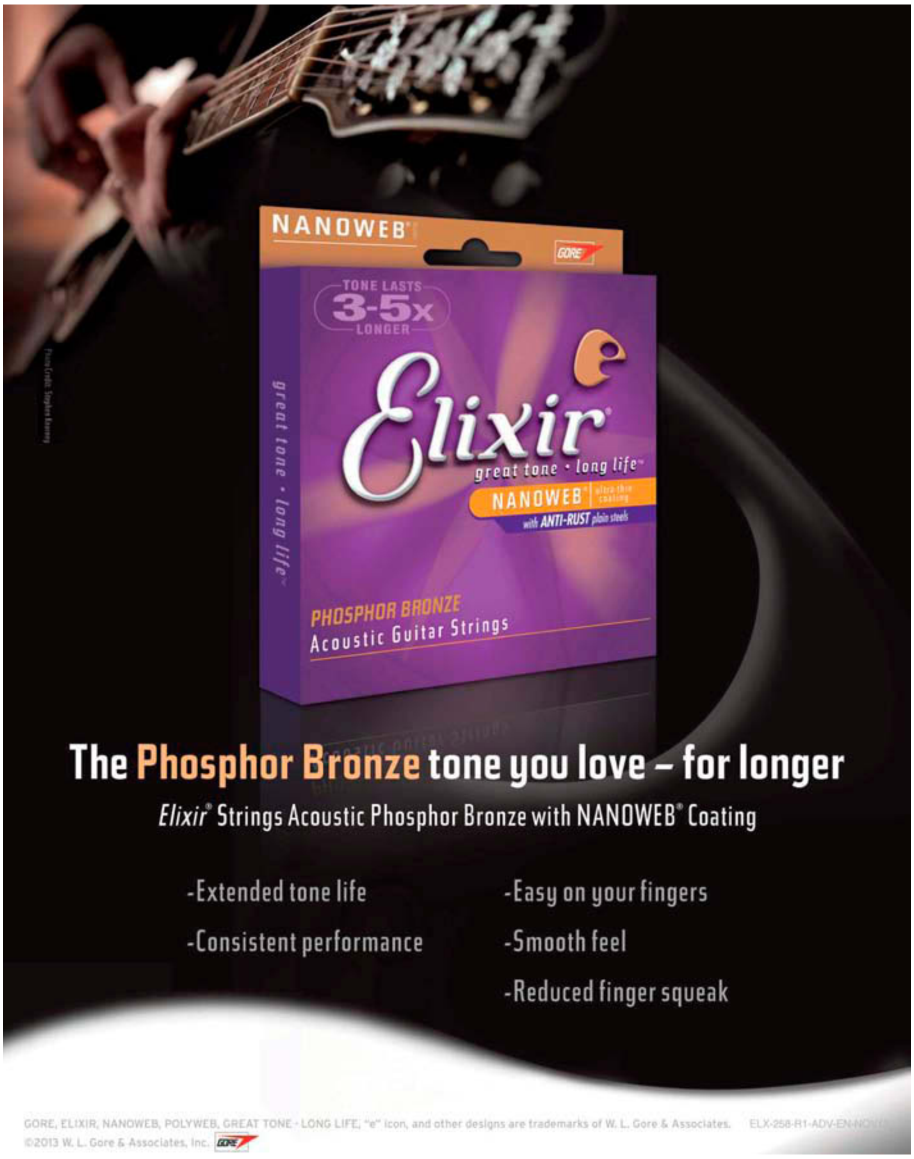

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THOMAS LEEB FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

'WAVES'

Stuart Ryan's 'Waves' falls under Thomas' microscope

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

Stuart Ryan is one of those people who are irritatingly good at whatever they turn their focus on. He can shred on an electric, then turn around and play nylon-string on stage with Martin Taylor, he knows his way around flatpicking territory and on top of it all, he plays the hell out of modern fingerstyle guitar as well. My inner two-year-old is screaming: "It's not fair!"

I'm excited to be looking excerpts from the tune 'Waves' from his album *The Way Home*. The tuning is G minor, DGDGBbD and you can find the video to it over on YouTube: https://youtu.be/daHE-awW9kI

PERFORMANCE NOTES

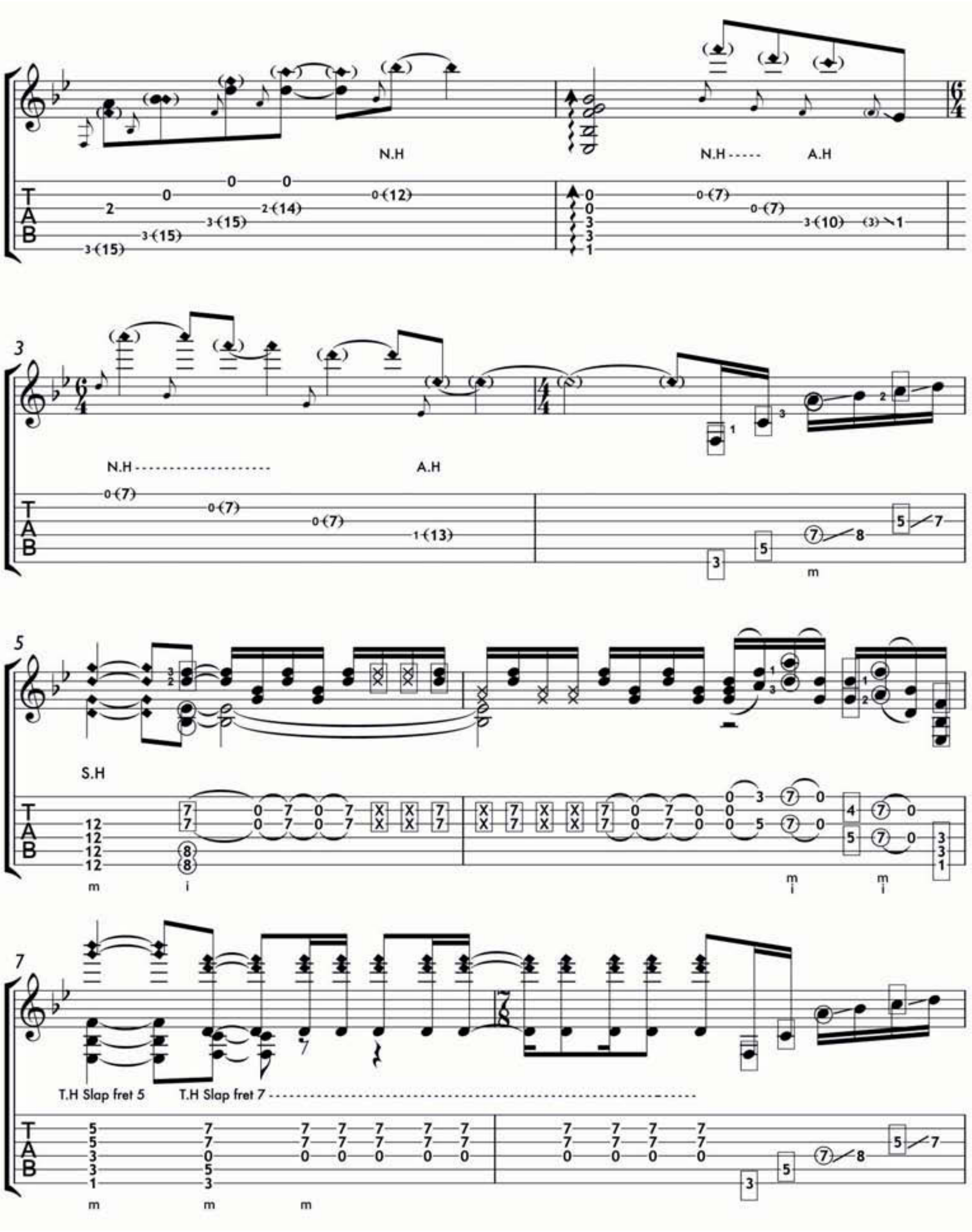
BAR 1

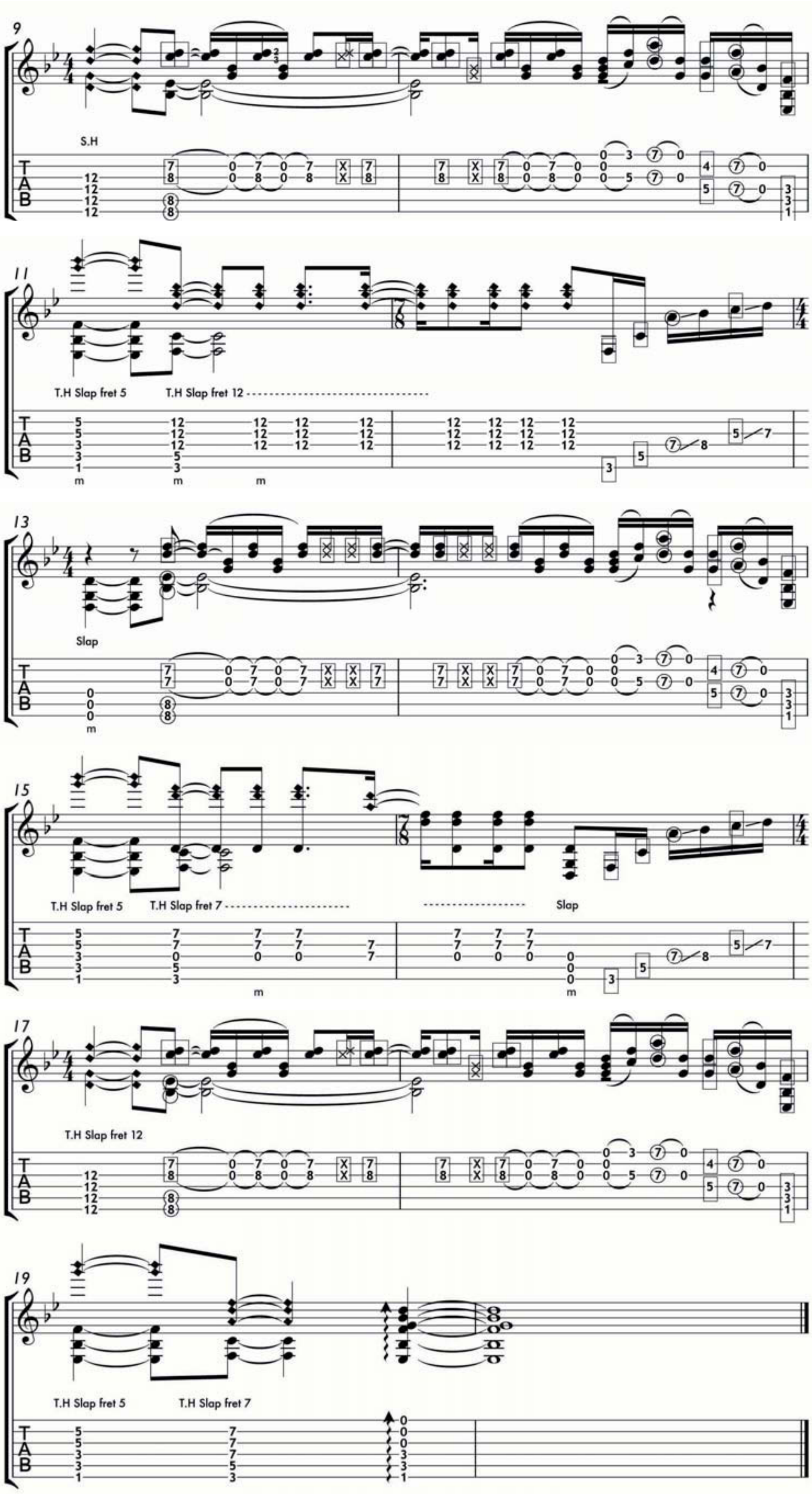
There's a good chance you haven't come across this before: we are looking at artificial harmonics and 'normal' notes played simultaneously. You'll sound the artificial harmonic by picking the string with your thumb while holding your right index finger over the harmonic node point (the number in brackets) and fretting the indicated fret with your left hand (the number next to that). To top it all off, you pick the 'normal' notes with your little finger. I recommend watching the video: there are some close-up shots in that which will clarify this.

BAR 4

This sequence combines the fretting hand 'hammer-on from nowhere' technique with picking hand tapped slides – the notes in circles are tapped at the seventh fret with the picking hand index or middle finger and then you simply slide this finger up to the eighth fret. This is then

'WAVES' (EXCERPT) – STUART RYAN





followed on by a 'hammer-on from nowhere' at the fifth fret of the third string which then slides up to the seventh.

BAR 5

To sound the 'slapped harmonics' I use the middle finger on the picking hand to slap the fretwire at the 12th fret. Sometimes you get a strong set of harmonics other times you get over-tones of the open strings but either way make sure the slap is quick and pull back the finger quickly so you don't get muted notes. This is followed by a combined 'hammer-on from nowhere' and picking hand tapping idea. Finally in this bar we see muted strings that are sounded with the 'hammer-on from nowhere' technique most famously used by Michael Hedges in the intro sequence of 'Aerial Boundaries'. Don't hammer-on too hard though or you will sound the notes at the seventh fret rather than getting the percussive, muted sound.

BAR 6

The phrase that starts on beat three contains several challenges – namely hammering-on two strings at the same time and tapping two strings simultaneously. Start by using the index finger on the picking hand to lightly brush down the open third, second and first strings. Next use the first and third fingers on the fretting hand to simultaneously hammer-on to frets three and five of the first and third strings. After this use the fretting hand index and middle fingers to tap on to the notes at fret seven and then use these two fingers to pull-off to the open strings. Beat four starts with a double hammer-on from nowhere onto frets four and five of the second and fourth strings, followed by tapping at fret seven and a pull-off to the open strings. Finally use the first, third and fourth fingers on the fretting hand to hammer-on to the chord.

BAR 7

The main focus here is the slapping technique with the index or middle finger of the picking hand – keep the chord in place from the end of the previous bar and then slap the chosen picking hand finger across the fifth fret. This will sound the chords and also the natural tapped harmonics if executed with enough speed and accuracy. The same technique is used again for the next chord and continues with picking hand slaps and tapped harmonics at fret seven. ■

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DANIEL HO GRAMMY WINNING UKULELE AND SLACK KEY GUITAR PLAYER

EXPLORING JS BACH

Daniel shares a piece from one of his favourite composers: JS Bach

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

Johann Sebastian Bach has long been one of my favorite composers. I developed a deep appreciation for his writing when I studied 18th century harmony in high school. Guided by my composition instructor, I learned how to analyse Bach's choral music and was taught the many rules derived from his voice leading and harmonic techniques: contrary motion, oblique motion, avoiding parallel 3rds, 5ths, and octaves, not doubling the bass note of a chord in first inversion.

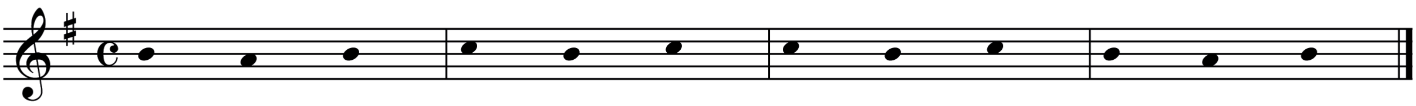
This was my introduction to the art of composition, and these techniques, in conjunction with jazz harmony, have remained the foundation of my work as a composer and arranger. As a player, I've always believed that understanding the intent of the composer – how and why those particular notes were chosen – helps to interpret a piece more musically.

If you look at music linearly, or melodically, each note is coming from somewhere and going somewhere. This is called voice leading. If you think of music vertically, or harmonically, each note has its function in a chord, whether it is defining the harmony as a chord tone, or an extension, which adds colour to the harmony.

I had wanted to record a solo ukulele arrangement of *Suite No. 1 in G major for Solo Cello, BWV 1007: I. Prelude* for many years. The first four bars fit so perfectly on an ukulele and I would always find myself playing it at soundcheck or while trying out a new instrument. When I began working on *Aloha España*, a classical guitar and ukulele album with Pepe Romero, I thought this was a timely opportunity. The reason I mention that *Suite No. 1* fits so perfectly on an ukulele is because I use a low G string. If you look at the first four measures, you'll notice that the G pedal tone can be played on the open low G string, while the rest of the notes can be arranged in a *campanella* pattern on the first, second, and third strings. The bell-like execution may feel a bit counterintuitive at first, but it is well worth the effort. Linear melodies sound more connected, harmonies ring out longer, and the ukulele sounds fuller when played in a *campanella* style.

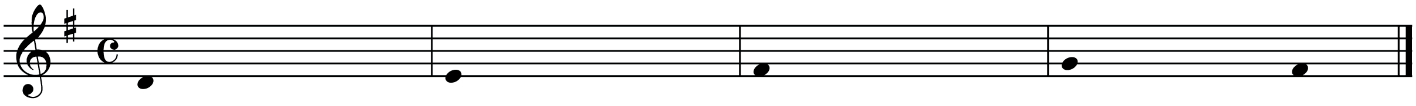
Let's take a closer look at the voice leading in the first four measures. In these analyses, we will not be taking rhythm into consideration, just the melodic lines. In measure one, the melodic theme, B – A – B, is established. In measure two, energy is generated by transposing the theme a step higher in the scale to C – B – C. This is called a diatonic transposition. Measure three retains the energy of measure two, and measure four releases it by returning to the original theme as stated in measure one.

FIGURE 1



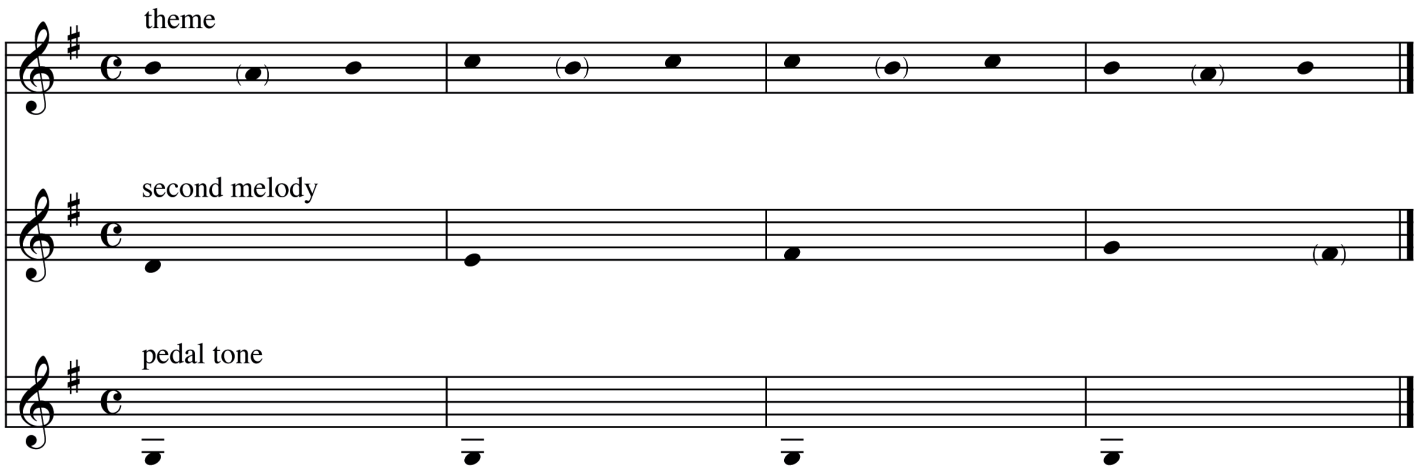
A second melody, D – E – F# - G, occurs below the theme in the first four measures. Notice in measure three, where the melodic theme (see **figure 1**) is identical to measure two, the second melody changes to maintain interest. The movement of this second melody happens in each measure until the end of measure four. At this point it moves to F#, which signifies an imminent musical change.

FIGURE 2

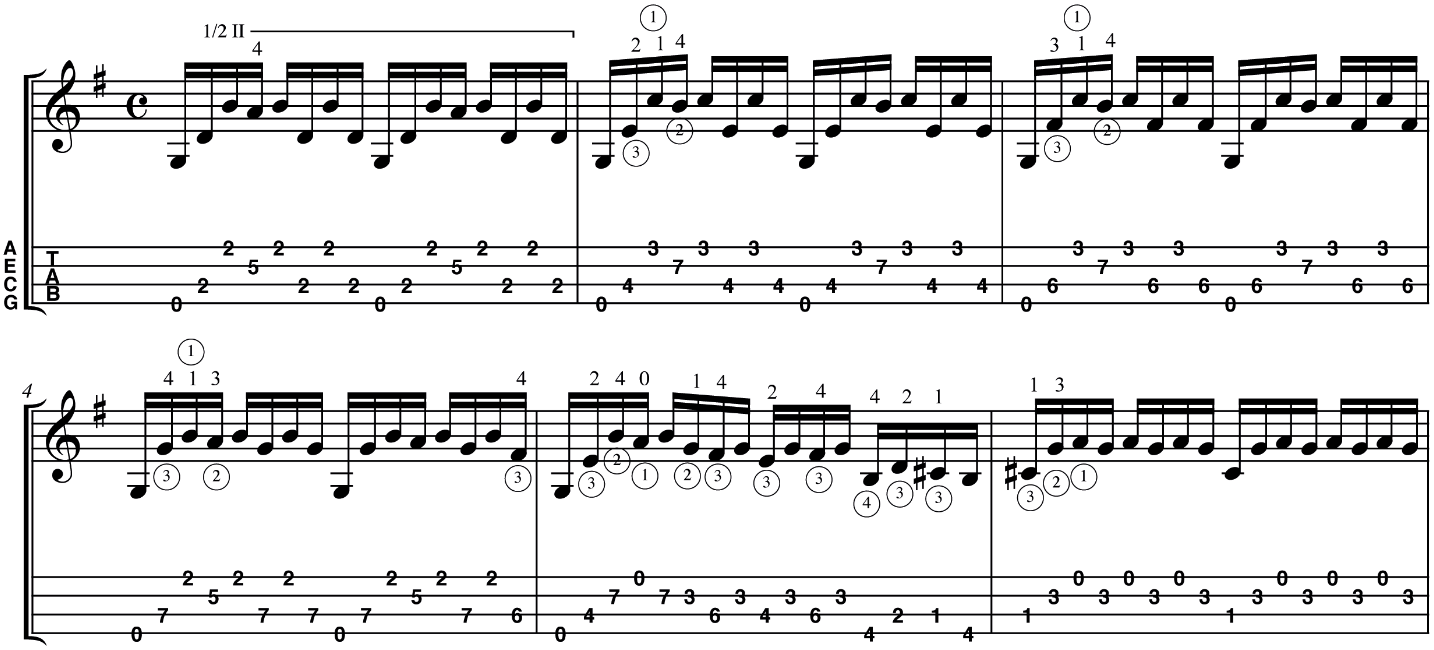


While these notes are beautiful melodies in and of themselves, they also serve a harmonic function. In **figure 3**, the theme, second melody, and pedal tone are lined up vertically to show how these melodies define chords. The notes in parentheses can be considered passing tones or chord extensions. The B, D, and G notes in measure one form a G major chord. The A note in parentheses would make it a G(add9) chord. In measure two, the C, E, and G form a C major chord in second inversion. The B note in parentheses would make it a Cma7/G chord. Measure three is interesting in that a chord is not completely defined with chord tones, but only hinted. The tritone interval between the C and F# suggests a D7 chord over a G pedal tone. Context – where it is coming from and where it is going – is an important consideration when analysing harmony. The measure before is a C major chord, which is the IV chord in the key of G, and the following measure is a G chord, which is the I chord in the key of G. These clues help to determine that a D7 (V7) is a reasonable evaluation. Finally, measure four is a G major chord, and the A and F# notes in parentheses form a Gma9 chord.

FIGURE 3



SUITE NO.1 IN G MAJOR, BWV 1007



Viewed through a musical microscope, Bach's music is full of delicate surprises and brilliant intricacies. Taking the time to discover them will help you play his music and even create your own with greater understanding. The complete sheet music (written in tablature and notation) is available at www.DanielHo.com. The album *Aloha España* (released on February 14, 2016) can be found on iTunes and at www.DanielHo.com. ■

CLIVE CARROLL ACOUSTIC VIRTUOSO

'EMBRACEABLE YOU'

Clive takes us through this jazz standard that will arm you with useful chord shapes and progressions

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

The first time this jazz standard really struck me was when I heard a version by the Time Jumpers at Nashville's famous Station Inn. While their interpretation has probably influenced this arrangement I have also included the occasional nod to jazz guitar great Joe Pass along the way.

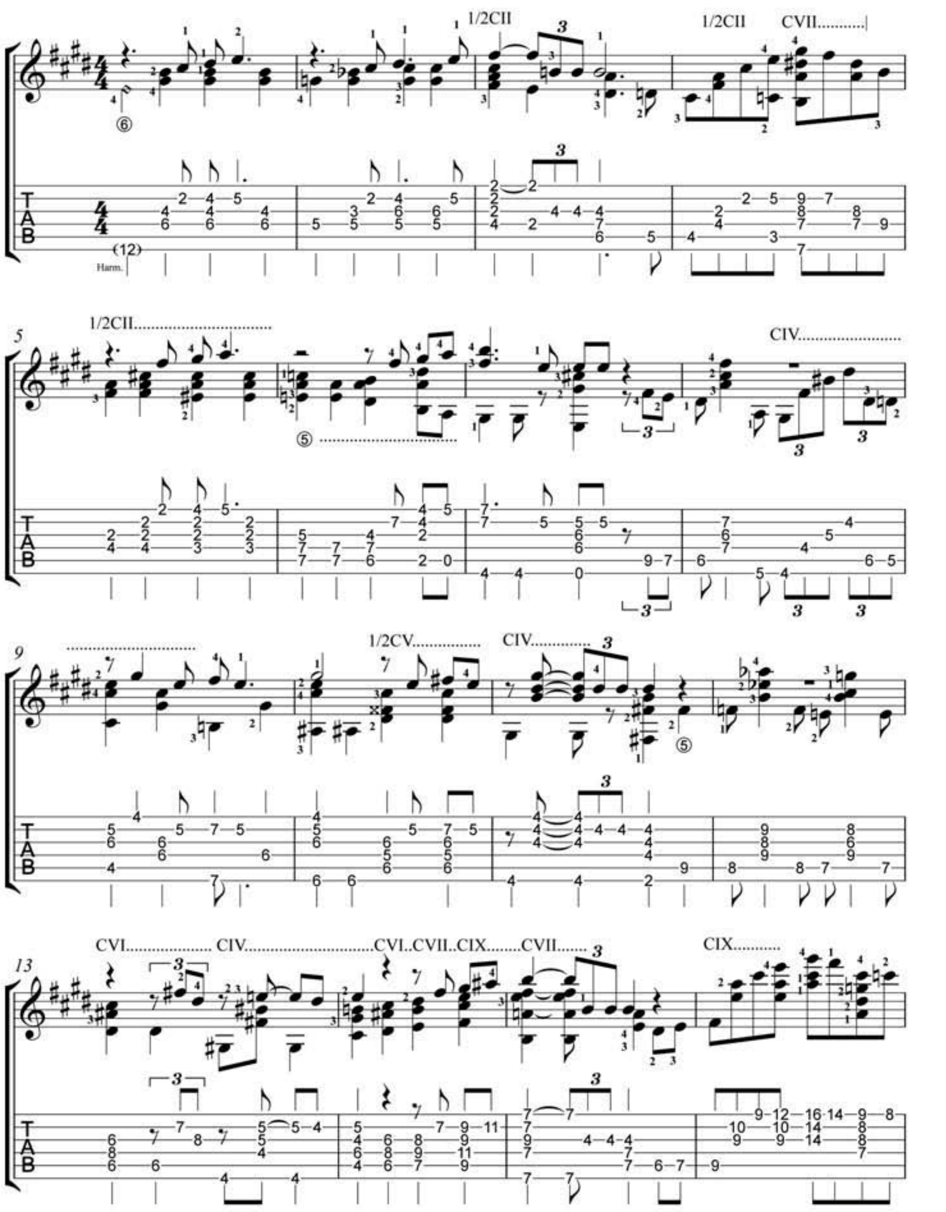
Detailed fingerings are included in the musical notation and 'C' or '1/2C' indicates the use of a barre or half barre. Practise this slowly and try out the marked fingerings, as there are some tricky chord shifts throughout. You will notice a small barre with the second finger at the end of bar 16, another with fingers one and three at bar 17, a second finger barre at the start of bar 22 and one with the fourth finger at the end of bar 32. Be careful not to press too firmly in these passages. Accuracy of placement on the fretboard is the important factor. By pressing just behind the fret wire only a moderate amount of pressure is required.

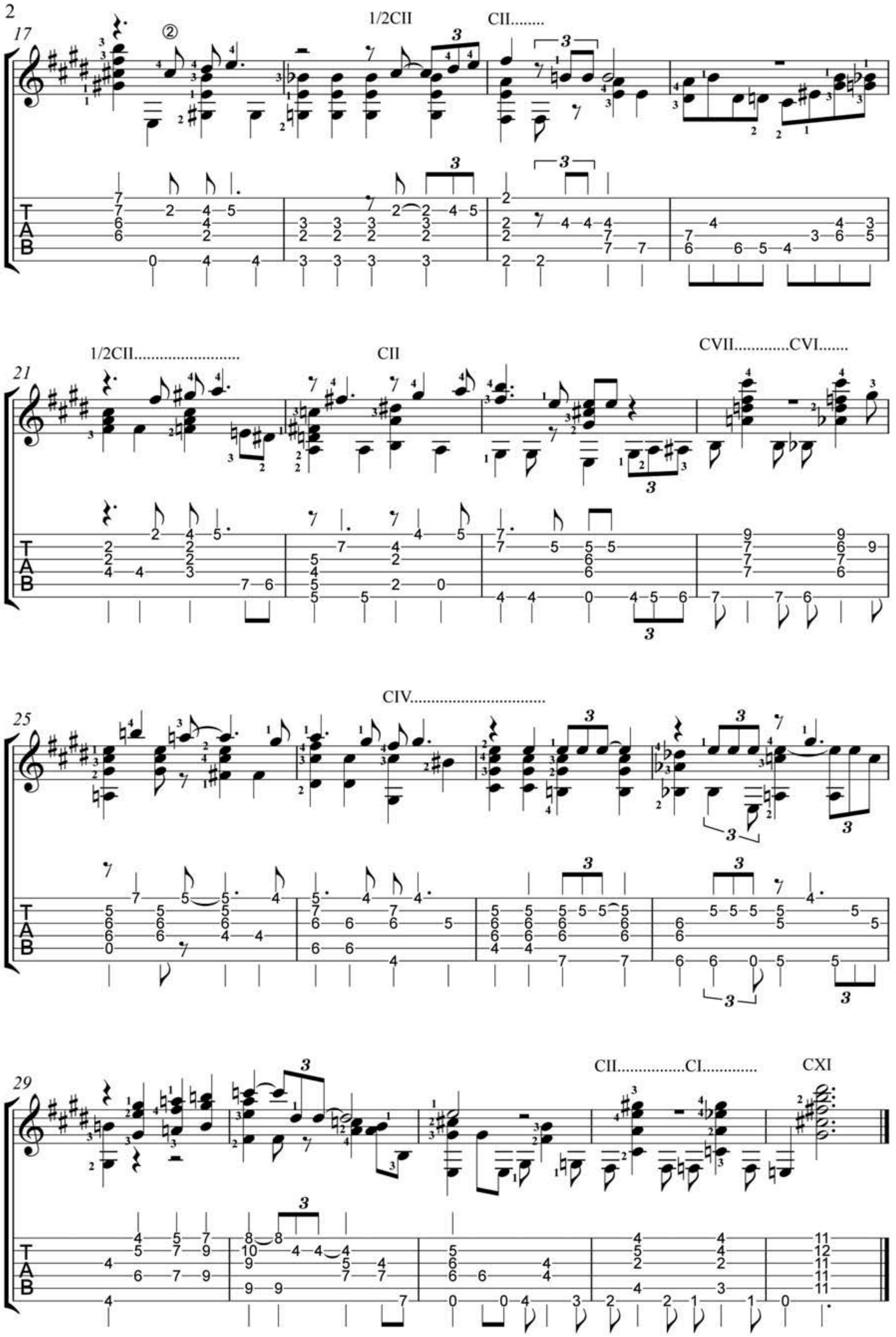
It goes without saying that the melody should sing clearly above the backing harmonies. Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday sang fantastic versions of 'Embraceable You' and it would be a good idea to familiarise yourself with the tune by listening to their renditions.

Where there are two or three-note harmonies in the chord sequences it is possible to further increase the voice/backing separation by strumming with the flesh of the thumb while picking the upper part with nail. This arrangement may look quite challenging but once memorised you will be armed with some very useful chord shapes and progressions.

I have recorded a slower version to accompany this score, which you can listen to at: ***www. clivecarroll.co.uk/acoustic-magazine.html*** ■

'EMBRACEABLE YOU' – ARR CLIVE CARROLL





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LEON HUNT UK BANJO EXPERT

BILL KEITH (1939-2015)

Leon Hunt pays tribute to a pioneer of five-string banjo playing and the man behind the Keith method

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Back in October 2015, Bill Keith, one of the true innovators of the five-string banjo sadly passed away. Having just written a farewell to another banjo legend, and not wanting this column to become more like an obituary page, I chose to leave it a while before paying my respects. I can't put it off any longer.

This month's offering is dedicated to one of the most significant and influential names in modern five-string banjo, and pioneer of the 'melodic' or 'Keith' style of playing, William Bradford "Bill" Keith.

In previous columns I've talked a lot about Earl Scruggs and his groundbreaking banjo style. I make no apologies for my enthusiasm on the subject, and I'm fully aware than this can occasionally border on the rabid. However, for all the appeal of Scruggs and his stylised approach to the instrument, its usefulness beyond the realms of traditional bluegrass music has proved to be limited.

By the early 60s, five-string banjo players were becoming musically restless and actively seeking out new, more versatile approaches to their instrument. A few players such as Bobby Thompson and Carroll Best began to develop what has now become known as the 'melodic' or 'Keith' style, but by far the most well-known of these early pioneers was the young Bostonian Bill Keith. While Keith was primarily a bluegrass musician (he actually spent nine months as one of Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys) his musical understanding and aspirations were clearly far more eclectic. His debut solo album *Something Auld, Something Newgrass, Something Borrowed, Something Bluegrass* is now regarded as a landmark event in the evolution of the instrument, featuring jazz standards such as 'Jordu' and 'Caravan' alongside traditional Irish and American folk music. There's even a great version of 'Auld Lang Syne' played almost exclusively on his 'trick' tuning pegs, now known as 'Keith Tuners'.

While the 'Keith' approach to the banjo borrows a great deal from Scruggs' style, it's far less pattern and lick based. Open strings still play a big part in achieving the all-important fluidity and speed, but now notes are selected to achieve far more specific musical passages, rather than approximations of more complex melodies. With this approach it's now possible to faithfully transcribe classical and jazz pieces, as well as a whole world of traditional tunes for the five-string banjo. By the late 70s the floodgates were wide open and legions of banjo players were having a stab, with varying degrees of success and taste, at almost any style of music you could think of.

Essential listening

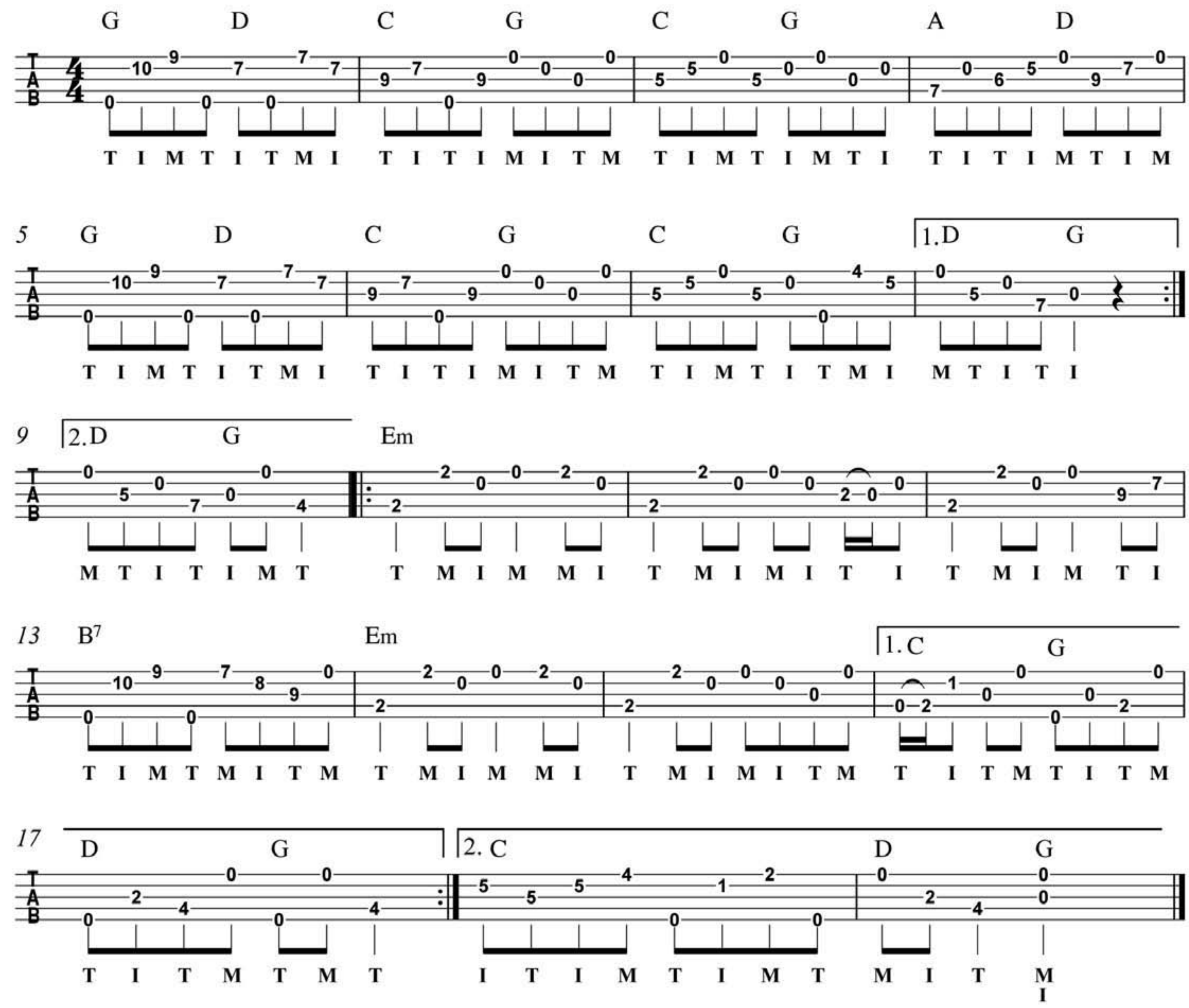
- *Something Auld, Something Newgrass, Something Borrowed, Something Bluegrass*
- *Fiddle Tunes for Banjo* (also feat. Tony Trischka and Béla Fleck)
- *Banjoistics*

KEITH TUNERS

Keith tuners were a development of a simple invention that Earl Scruggs had come up with decades earlier. The idea was to be able to quickly and accurately change the pitch of any given string (usually the second and third strings) during the performance of a song, rather like a pedal steel guitar. Listen to recordings of *Earl's Breakdown, Randy Lynn Rag or Flint Hill Special* to hear them put to good use. Earl's solution was to attach an arrangement of cams and levers to the headstock of his banjo which would push directly against the strings, raising or lowering the note as required. Keith was clearly intrigued by the idea, so much so he felt compelled to come up with his own, more elegant and convenient solution. His Beacon Banjo Company (now run by Bill's son, Martin) still manufactures and markets Keith Tuners today. These beautifully engineered tuners each have a pair of thumbscrews that allow the user to set them between any two points. As long as your banjo is well set up with fresh strings and a free running bridge and nut they are pretty much 100 per cent accurate, and great fun!

Keith tuners are the original and unquestionably the best, but they're not cheap at $220 for 2. For a less expensive alternative check out the German company Schaller, they make an adequate alternative at just under $100.

BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM – KEY OF G



'Blackberry Blossom' is one of the most well-known and popular tunes in the bluegrass repertoire. This arrangement epitomises Keith's approach to the banjo and is great fun to play. Like most arrangements of tunes in the 'Keith' style, once you have it submitted to muscle memory, it should become fairly easy to play. If you're having trouble getting to a note, or getting through a passage smoothly, there's every chance you're doing something wrong. You'll need to be 100 per cent correct with your right hand fingering (I've included this with the tablature) and choose the left hand fingering that suits you best. Try to come up with a manageable sequence of 'cells', or groups of notes, rather than spidering your way around the fingerboard one note at a time. Not only will this make life easier for your left hand it'll also be a great help with remembering the piece too. I strongly advise experimenting with two or three ways of getting through each passage before finally settling and submitting it to deep memory.

I've also included the chords as they move pretty quickly, especially for a bluegrass tune. The first section is in G and the second shifts nicely to the relative minor (Em). It's mostly all the usual suspects but with the addition of an A chord in the first part and a B7 chord in the second part.

As discussed in previous columns, this distinctive fast moving sequence with the occasional chord pushing things harmonically outside of the diatonic key centre, affords us the ability to easily create some nice variations just by playing with a mixture of rolls and different inversions of the chords. ■

CHRIS WOODS CONTEMPORARY ACOUSTIC GROOVE PLAYER

DIFFERENT VOICES

Chris teaches how to spice up our playing with a look at chord voicings

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

This month we're looking at broadening our chord horizons. Every chord you play has a huge range of alternative voicings. Put simply: each chord can be played in a variety of different positions. When we do this, we keep the character of the chord but we can add some variety and spice.

Here I've created three different versions of the same chord sequence with three different ways to play each chord. I've tabbed out a percussive and driving fingerpicking pattern for you here, but if you're not feeling too fussed about fiddling around with finger picking just check out the shapes in the chord windows.

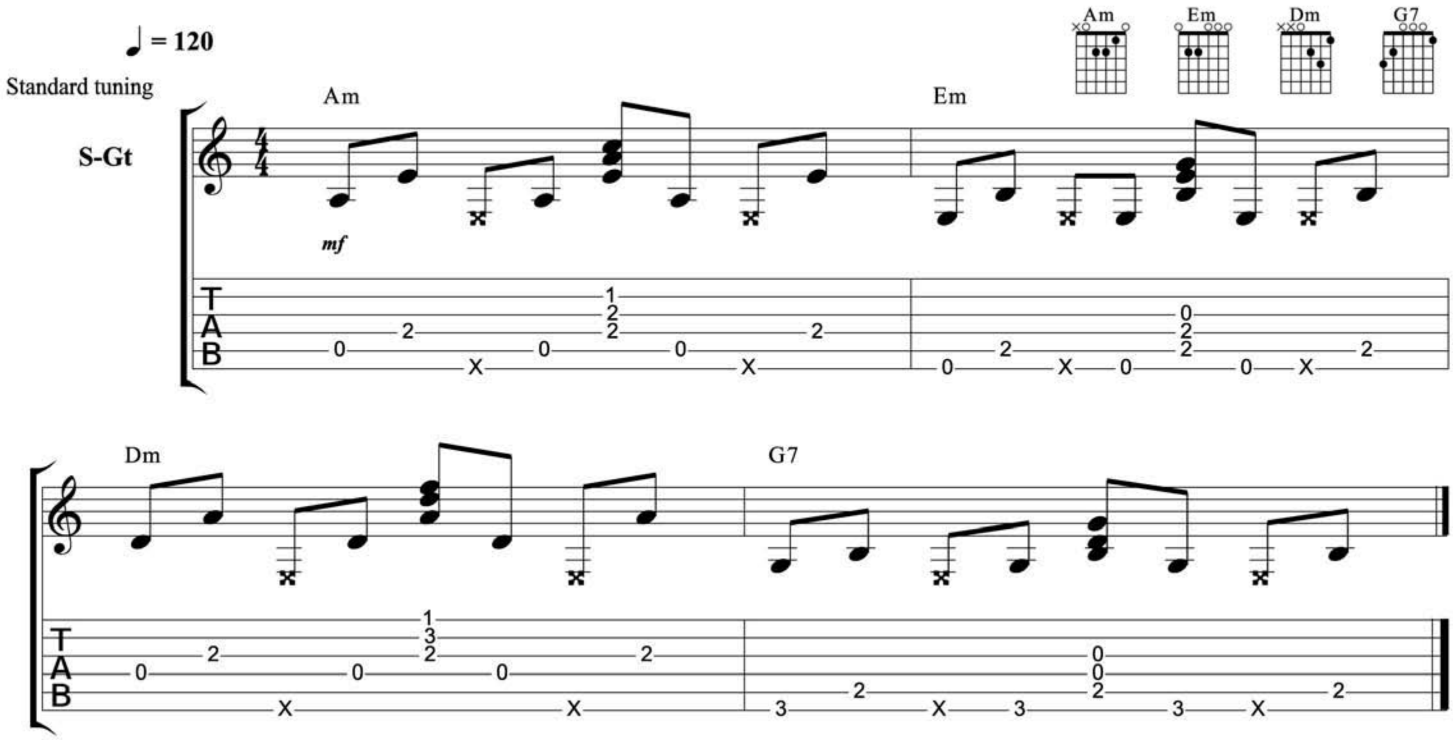
The sequence is Am, Em, Dm, G7. In all cases the first note of the bar is the root note of the chord, and apart from the first example they are all movable shapes. So, if you're feeling brave why not try moving each chord to a different fret to widen your horizons even further?

For example: chord number one in **example 2** is an Am, by moving the chord up two frets it becomes a Bm. Essentially you can apply every shape here to any chord. When it comes to the finger picking pattern notice how the string slap (notated with an X) always lands on beats two and four, just like a snare drum would. We are also working with a continuous and equal pattern of quavers, so you can count '1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and', with a note falling on each count of the 'number' as well as the 'and'. Once you've mastered each example try mixing them up.

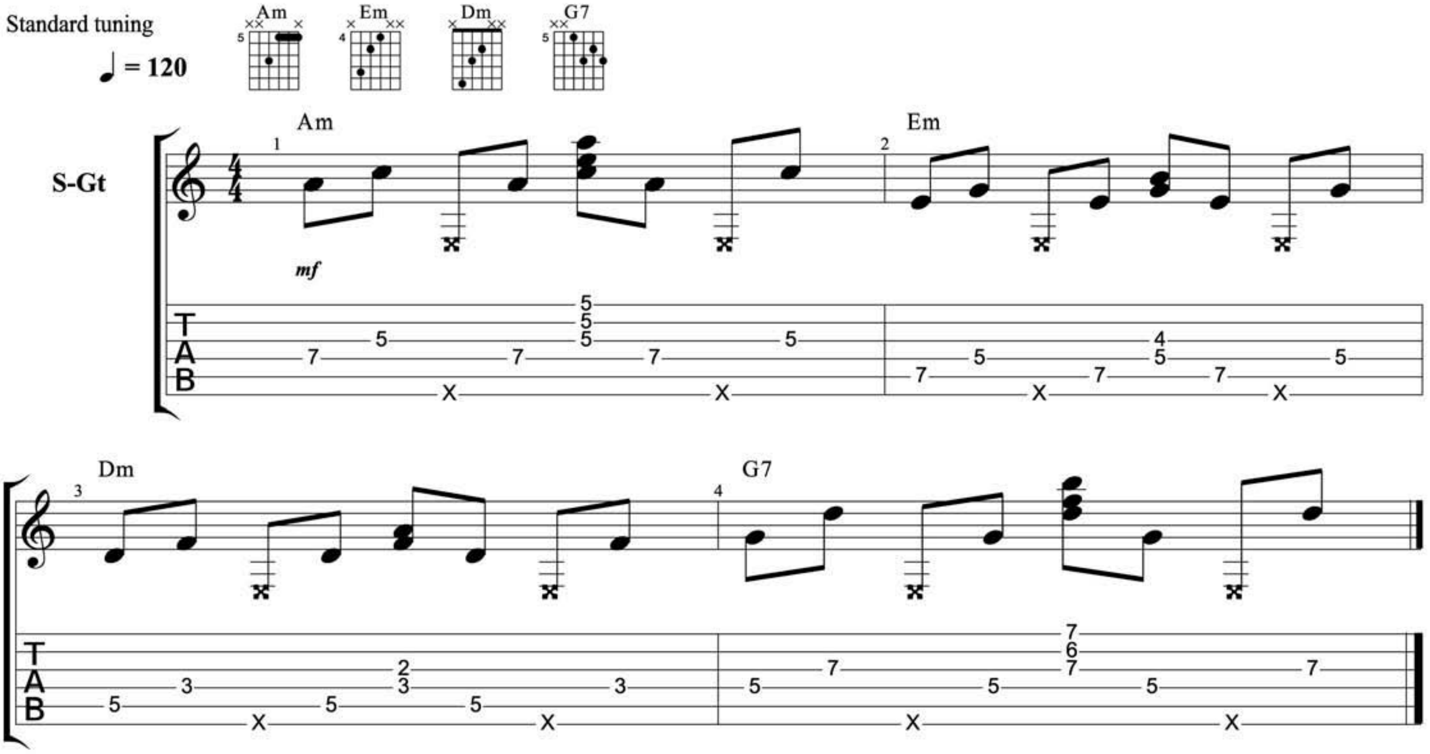
One of the great things about different voicing of chords is how they can suggest movement, so the second voicing of Am for example could be fitted in at the end of the bar, or in fact why not work through three different voicings of the same chord within the same bar to really create a feeling of movement and progression.

Enjoy yourself, take your time and remember to check out the video to help you and for added clarity: ***https://youtu.be/V6Igwu3luJg***

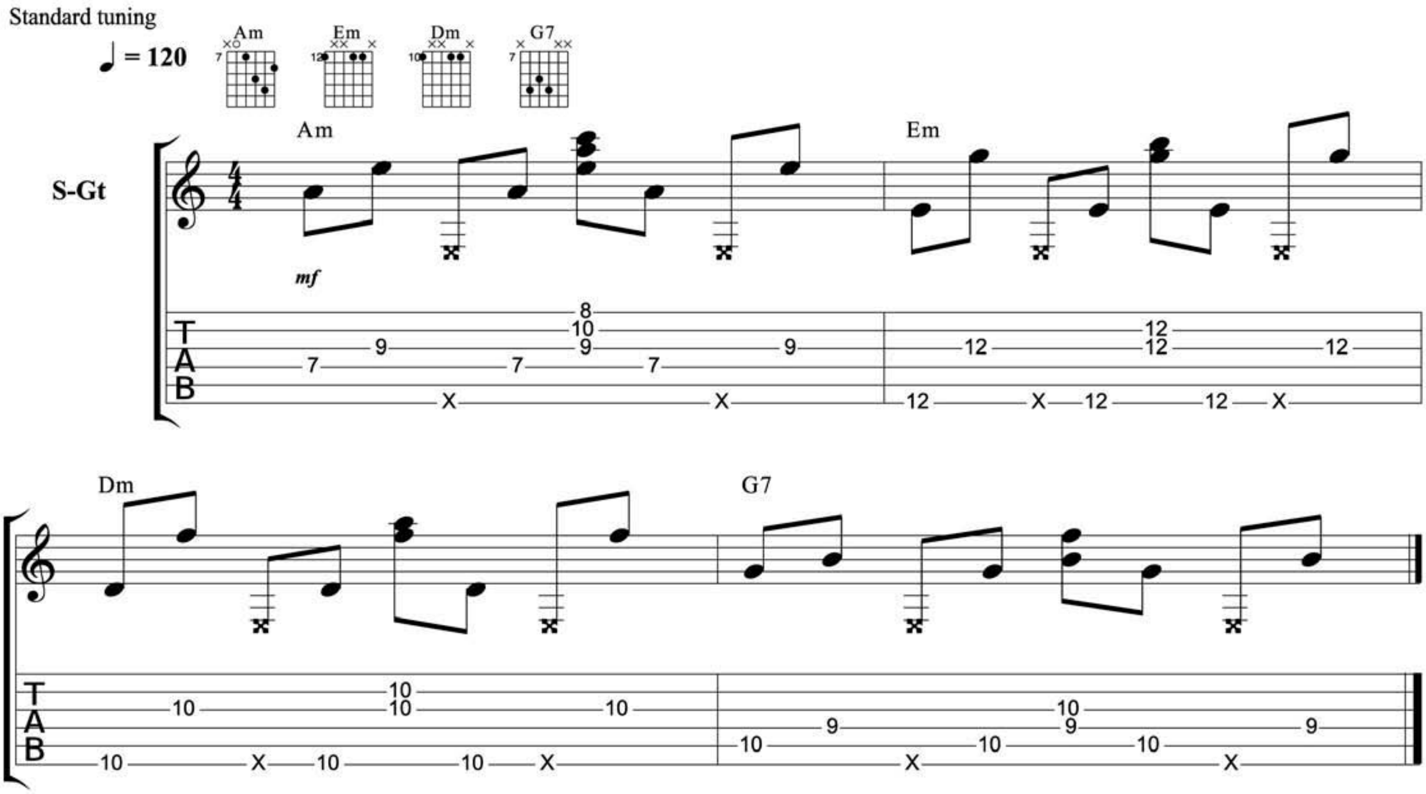
EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



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PAUL BRETT VINTAGE GUITAR EXPERT AND 12-STRING AFICIONADO

12-STRING CORNER

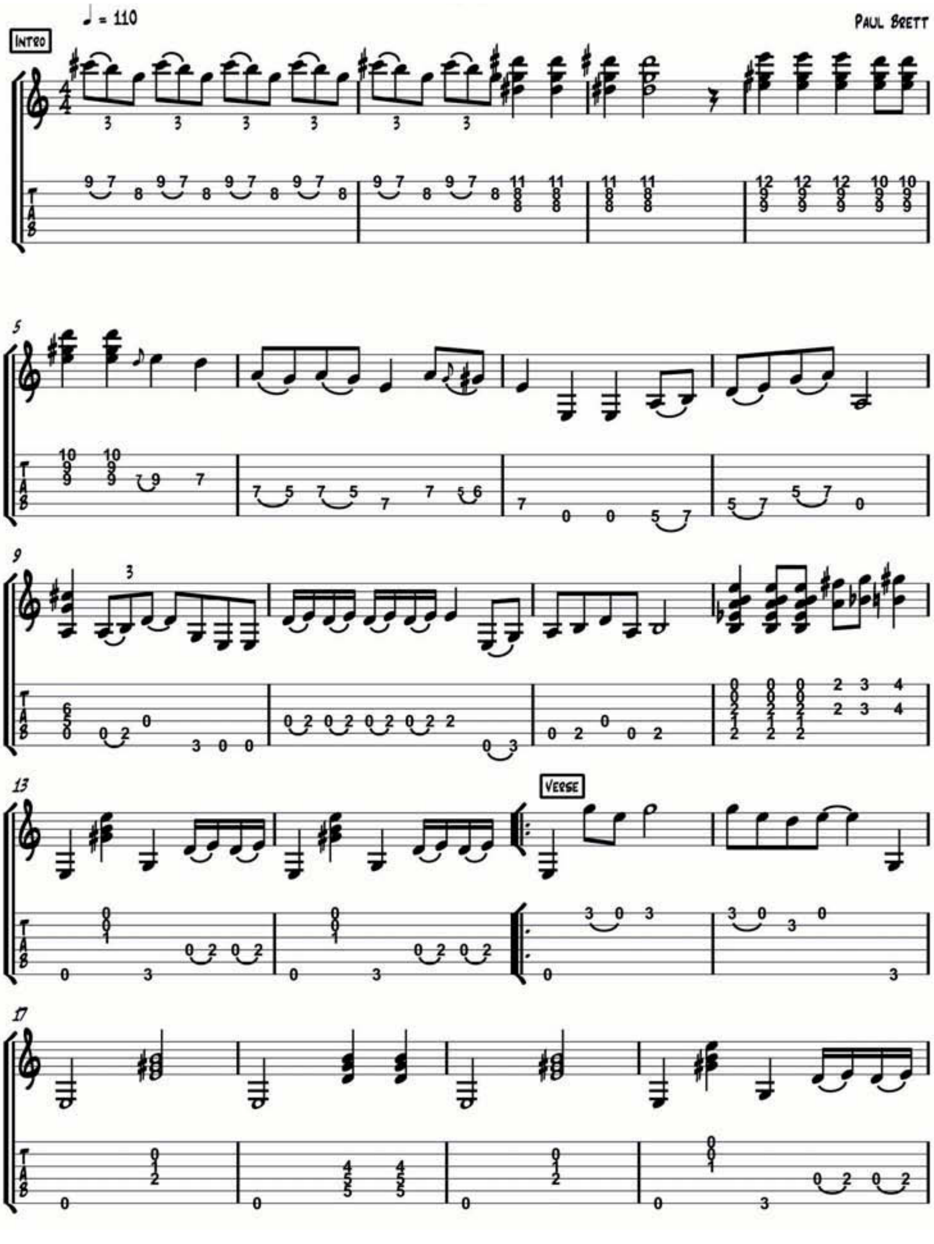
Paul Brett recalls his time spent jamming with Jimi Hendrix and reflects on the late guitar hero's potential legacy as a 12-string player

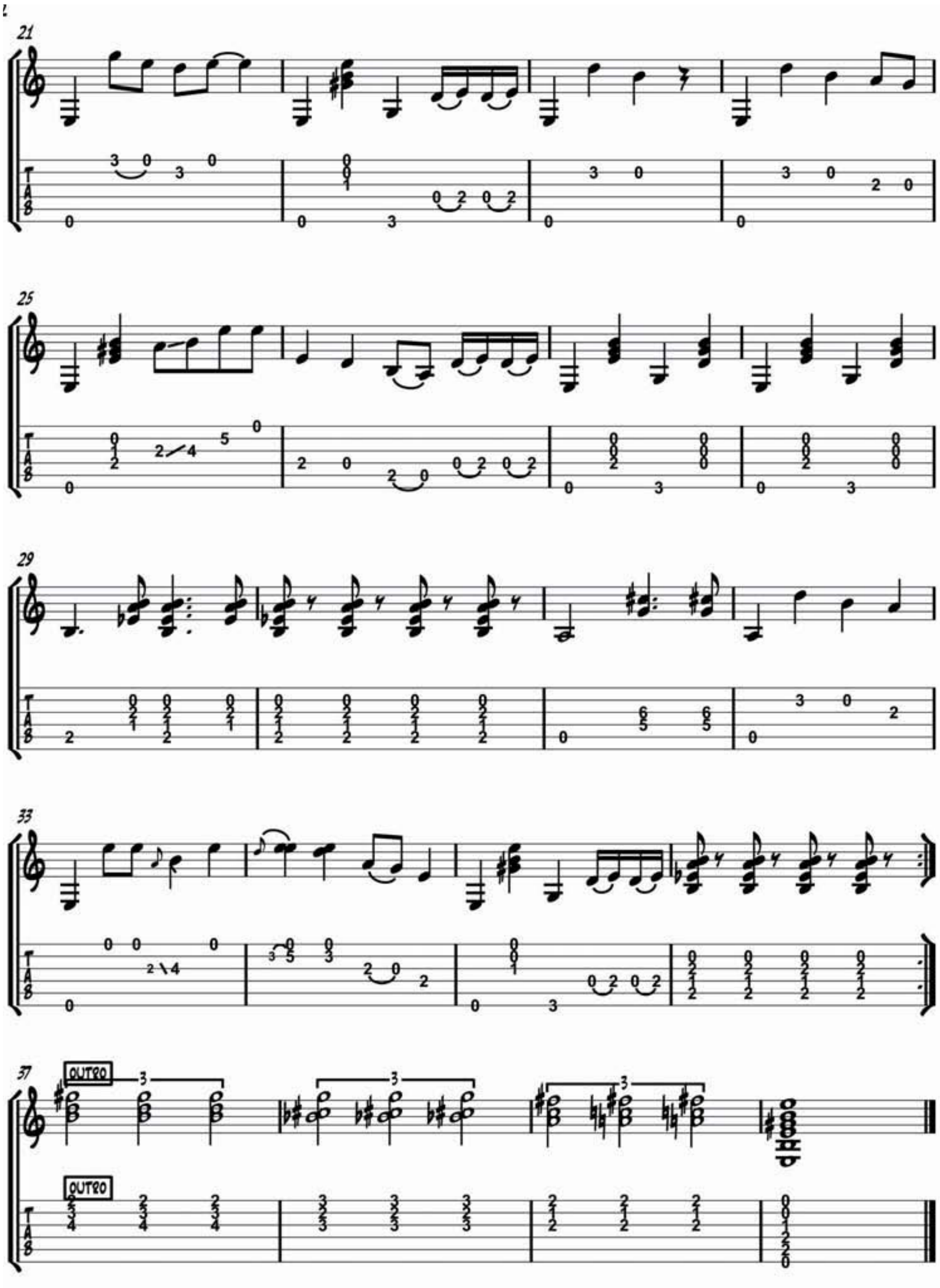
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Back in the mid to late 60s the British music scene across all genres saw an explosion of creative talent the likes that haven't been seen since, in my humble opinion. I turned professional at 16 and my first pro gig was following Jimmy Paige into Neil Christian and the Crusaders, who had a chart hit with 'That's Nice'. There were many music venues, and London especially hosted all kinds of clubs for all tastes in music. Late night or after hours membership clubs were the meeting place for musicians who would appear after they had played their respective gigs. The Speakeasy, Blazers, Cromwellian and Oxford Street Club were among some of the favourites. They were great places to just relax and jam with fellow artistes and unwind.

I jammed with lots of people, but I guess the one I used to enjoy playing with the most was Jimi Hendrix. In those unpressured situations, Jimi preferred to play bass guitar. We jammed mainly blues and the odd classic song, like Dylan's 'All Along The Watchtower', which I still play in my set. It's hard to put into words the impact Hendrix had on the rock scene in the UK at the time.

I think a lot of credit must go to Animals bass guitarist Chas Chandler who saw Jimi's potential and brought him over to the UK and got him together with drummer Mitch Mitchell and bassist Noel Redding. Chas became Jimi's manager and started booking the Experience out on club and university gigs. I was playing at the time with Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera who had had a chart hit with 'Flames', which also featured on the first rock compilation album to hit the top of the UK charts: *The Rock Machine Turns You On*, released through CBS.





Chas invited us to see Jimi's London concert at the Saville Theatre in June 1967. There were many well known musicians and media people in the audience that day and everyone was stunned into shock and awe at the sheer brilliance of the man. The whole thing was right for the time: music, image, sound, showmanship, originality and raw power. A true guitar hero had landed!

Like all musicians, you morph into other things as you progress through music and that's what Jimi did. It's an amazing difference that time and world changes have on trends. Jimi was a godlike figure for a number of short years, but then his star waned and he almost faded into obscurity before his untimely death in 1972 at the age of 27. I could write lots more about that time and Jimi but space is against me, so onto Jimi's dalliance with a 12-string.

I never knew that Jimi dabbled with 12-string guitars until later when I saw his studio video of 'Hear My Train A Comin''. It didn't quite sound like a finished production, but certainly highlighted that under different circumstances, he could have been a major acoustic 12-string blues artiste to add to his immense electric guitar skills. In fact if you watch the video, you can pick out some classic Hendrix crossover riffs in the mix. The tabs for this or links to are included in this feature and here's the YouTube link to Jimi's original video: ***http://youtu.be/IPtv14q9ZDg*** and the short lyrics:

Well I wait around the train station
Waitin' for that train
Waitin' for the train, yeah
Take me, yeah, from this lonesome place
Well now a whole lotta people put me down
a lot 'a changes
My girl had called me a disgrace

The tears burnin'
Tears burnin' me
Tears burnin' me way down in my heart
Well you know it's too bad, little girl, it's too bad, too bad we have to part

Gonna leave this town, yeah
Gotta leave this town
Gonna make a whole lotta money
Gonna be big, yeah
Gonna be big yeah
I'm gonna buy this town
I'm gonna buy this town, an' put it all in my shoe
(might even give a piece to you)
That's what I'm gonna do, what I'm gonna do, what I'm gonna do. ■

I had a letter from a 12-string player named Johnny who asked if it was possible if I would mention other 12 string players in my articles like himself. It does seem like a good idea to me to occasionally feature 12-string guitarists who play around the country and reveal what style they play, their experiences of playing and problems they may face in developing techniques. Email me at paul@fret-dancer.com if you're interested.

I have some new signature 12 string soon to be released by Vintage Guitars. There is a 12-string version of my Viator Travel guitar and a tribute 12-string to the legendary Blind Willie McTell, specifically aimed at blues players. Both will feature Fishman electronics. Rest assured I will keep readers posted as to progress! My thanks once again for the tab to guitarist Mark Thompson.

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MATT STEVENS INSTRUMENTAL COMPOSER

IN THE LOOP

Matt delves into the murky – and possibly 8-bit – world of post-loop processing

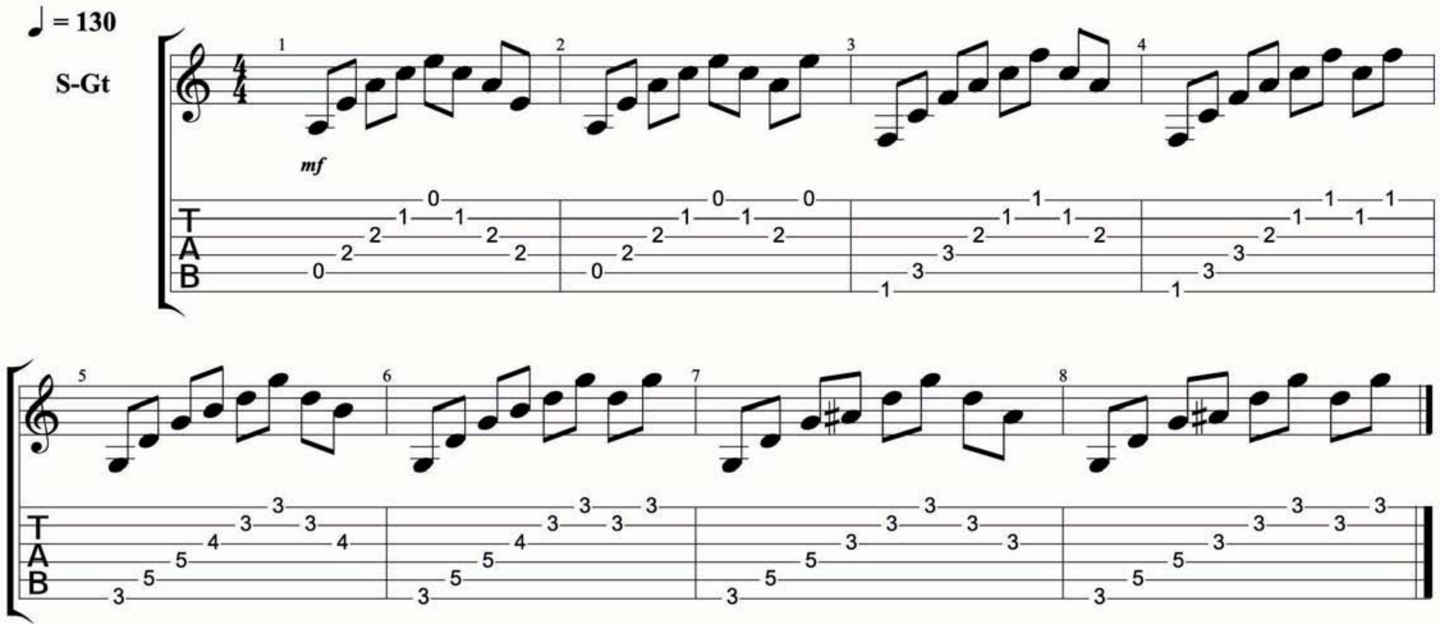
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Live looping is wonderful for creating arrangements on the fly, develop songwriting ideas or just for practice, but the problem you are always going to go up against is that because you're playing over a loop you're dealing with repetition. Repetition means it can be easy for an audience to become bored. In this month's column we're going to look at ways to mangle and change your live loops with effects to create more interest. There is no reason you can't put the loops you record live through analogue synth filters, chorus, bit crushers or any other kind of effect you have to hand as a pedal or have access to via your laptop. If you listen to the work of Christian Fennesz on the key guitar/electronica record *Endless Summer*, he ran his acoustic guitar through a bunch of old guitar pedals and a laptop running the program Max/MSP to create new and original sounds that sounded utterly unique.

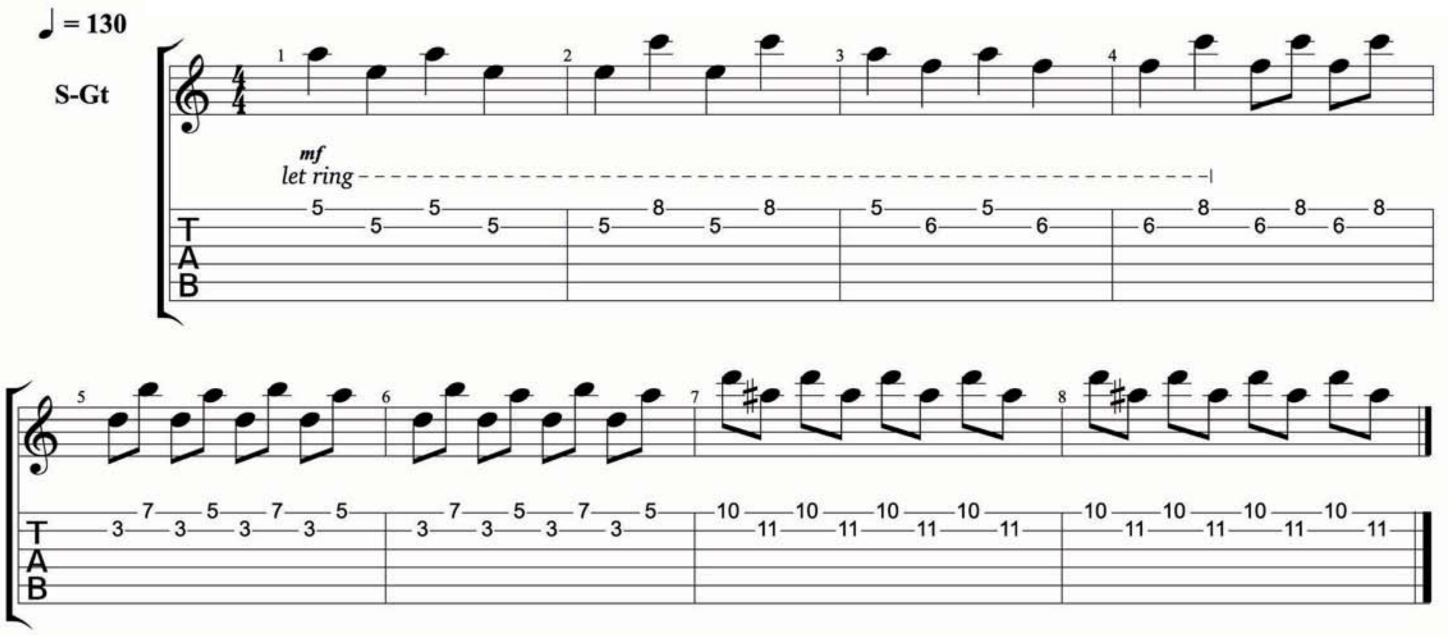
First we're going to record in a loop that is simple and melodic. It's a simple picking sequence based on Am, Fm, G and Gm. We'll keep the chord sequence simple to allow us to focus on the signal processing we're going to be doing after the loop. Hit loop/record on your pedal and play **example 1**, recording it as a loop. In previous columns we've looked at how to use effects pedals placed before your loop pedal in the effects chain to create interesting sounds, such as delay and chorus. So normally your effects chain from your guitar to your loop pedal might run: guitar, tuner pedal, octave pedal and then your loop pedal as the final item in your signal chain. This month we are going to place the effect after the loop, to change the sound of the loop after it has been recorded rather than in front of it in your effects chain. So for example your pedal chain could run from your guitar to a tuner to your octave then into your loop pedal with perhaps a reverb set to a cathedral setting or a bit crusher for a lo-fi computer sound. Then as you sing or play over your loop you can change the sound just by kicking in a pedal placed after your loop in the effects chain, with the loop constantly playing. This allows you to create a dynamic effect that listeners may not expect. You'll need to bear in mind that if you are playing an instrument on the same channel as the loop your sound will also be altered.

As an arrangement tool, a pedal set-up such as your guitar going into a tuner then an octave

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



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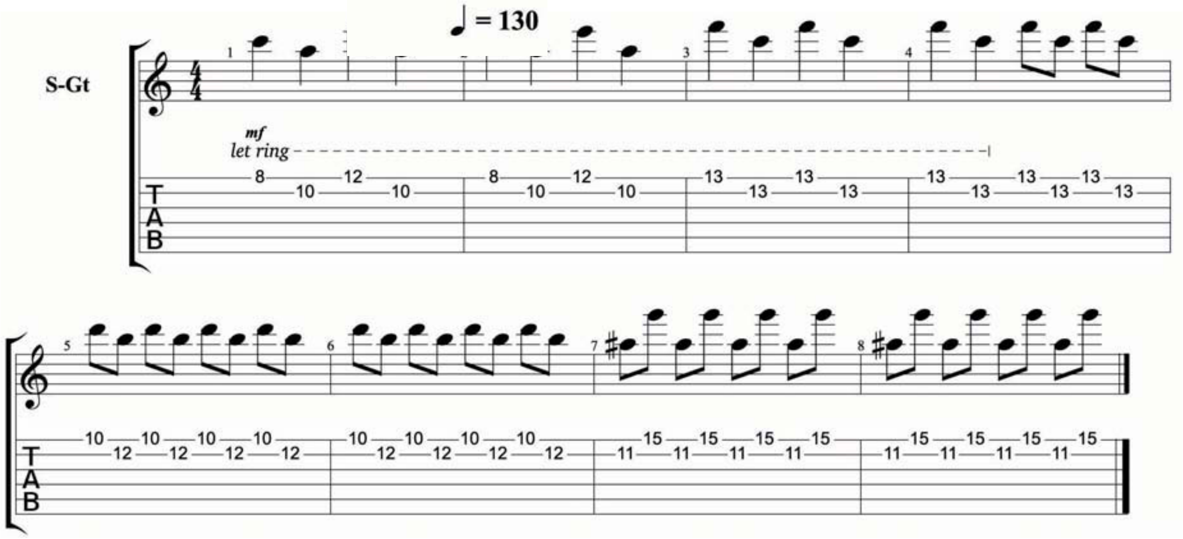

into a loop with a few post-loop effects gives you some interesting extra options. You could have a verse that is just the plain loop with a chorus where you kick in a reverb for a dynamic lift but keep the loop the same, and then for the second chorus you could add a reverb and a touch of subtle distortion. Try and think more like a hip-hop producer and you can use the loop you have made to create lots of interesting sounds. Listen to DJ Shadow's *Endtroducing* album or Portishead's *Dummy* album to hear some great examples of post-loop processing.

Now we have a loop, we can add a few more melodic ideas as shown in **example 2**. We can either switch off the post-loop effects or leave them on, it's up to you. Remember to try and keep varying your sounds to keep the audience interested. **Example 3** is another melodic layer to go over the top of your loops, perhaps this time you could leave your post-loop effect such as reverb switched on.

If you are feeling really adventurous you could really start to mess with the loops you have recorded with even more adventurous effects in the chain. Solo bassist Steve Lawson adds a filter pedal to his loops set to random with very strong sweeps between frequencies, changing the loop each time it goes around. You could also try a bit crusher pedal, this will accentuate certain frequencies on lower settings and or turn your lovely acoustic loop into a broken 80s computer sound on higher settings. You can also manipulate the settings on the various pedals you are using to process your loops like a DJ in front of the audience to create different sounds.

The key with post-loop processing is to constantly experiment and try new things, you won't know what effect will work best for your song unless you try it. Perhaps you are the person to popularise the sound of the 8-bit heavily reversed and looped acoustic guitar. ■

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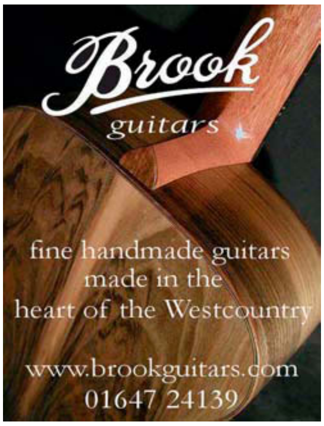

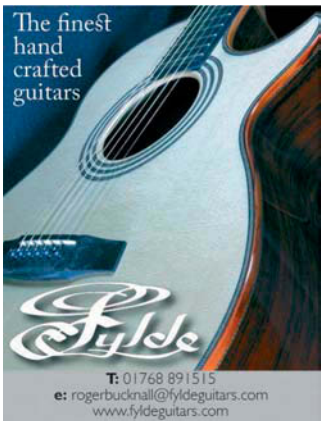

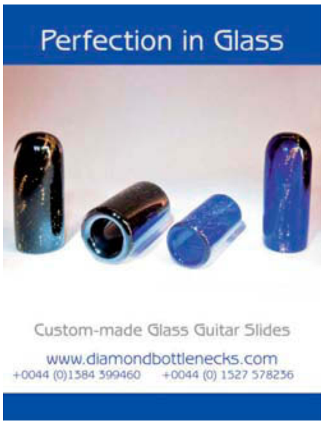

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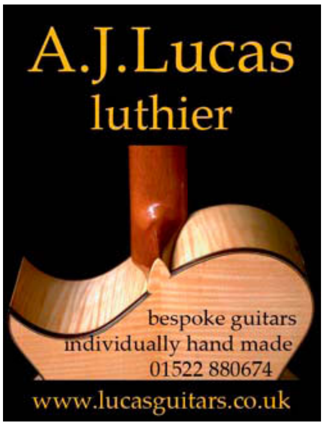

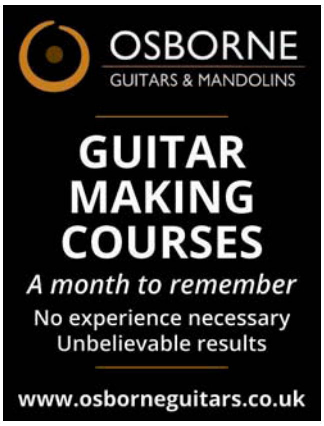

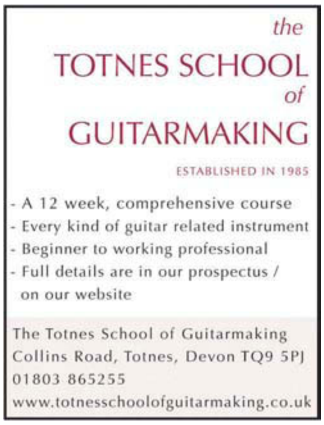

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CLARENCE WHITE

WORDS: TERI SACCONE **IMAGE:** DAN VOLONNINO

An elegant and feverishly accomplished flatpicker, Clarence White was a prolific musician who helped forge the genre of country rock before his premature death. A member of the Byrds, Nashville West and the Kentucky Colonels, White was not only an eminent session player he was also an inventor, and the consummate musician's musician. Some of those who cite his influence include Norman Blake, Tony Rice and Al Di Meola.

Born Clarence Joseph LeBlanc in June 1944 in Lewiston, Maine, the LeBlanc family – who later changed their surname to White – moved to California when Clarence was a toddler. The large White household was immersed in music due to Clarence's father, Eric, who played banjo, fiddle, harmonica and guitar. A child prodigy, Clarence began playing the six-string guitar at the early age of six. Being so young he was a little too small to confidently grapple with its size so he briefly switched to ukulele until he was able to deftly wield a guitar.

Young Clarence joined his older sibling's band, the Country Boys, a bluegrass outfit, when he was just 10. The Country Boys may have been young but the band was no hobby. In fact, they played live in LA, made records and appeared on TV until eventually morphing into the Kentucky Colonels. The Colonels were a progressive bluegrass group who made a name for themselves first on the LA scene during the early 60s and then nationally by appearing at big folk festivals of the day. They recorded several albums and had a fair share of fame in the country genre. By the time Clarence departed the Colonels in the mid 60s, he was entrenched as a session guitarist appearing on many pop and rock albums. He played with artists including Jackson Browne, the Everly Brothers, Joe Cocker, the Monkees, Arlo Guthrie and Randy Newman.

By the mid 60s, White's flatpicking in the Doc Watson style had become distinctive and perfected, which furthered his reputation among the music cognoscenti. He also began playing with the duo of Gene Parsons (a Byrd) and Gib Guilbeau in local California clubs before joining Nashville West (a nascent incarnation of what would later become the Flying Burrito Brothers). The band recorded an album for Sierra Records, but it didn't get a release until 1978. On the track 'Dark Hollow' you can hear both White's playing and deep singing voice. NW have grown in reputation over the years for their innate musicality and hybrid rock/country alchemy.

Although he played lead guitar on earlier Byrds album *Younger Than Yesterday*, White was invited to join the band as an ordained member in late 1968. Lead Byrd Roger McGuinn was recruiting a new lineup after losing both Gram Parsons and Chris Hillman.

Clarence's vision and skills helped shape the Byrds in their new country/rock creative direction. He played on the beautiful and iconic *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*. The seminal album moved the Byrds away from psychedelia straight into this burgeoning new style. *Sweetheart* established the genre of country rock itself, and although many think of the Byrds' earlier canon first when they are considered, it is the countrified White-era Byrds that is both the critical and fan favourite, with the twin leads helmed by White and Roger McGuinn.

Standout White-era Byrd tracks such as 'I Am A Pilgrim' and 'Tulsa County' feature Clarence's superb picking (his timing and syncopation are extraordinary) combined with Chris Hillman's world-weary vocals; a killer combination that strikes to the heart of bluegrass.

White's playing shone on another Byrds landmark album: *Live at the Fillmore –February 1969,* which illustrates his profligate electric skills. After the Byrds disbanded Clarence carried on doing session work including contributions to the Flying Burrito Brothers' Hot Burrito. Then four tracks into recording what was planned to be his first solo album he he was killed by a drunk driver while loading equipment onto a van by the roadside in LA. He died on July 14, 1973.

Posthumous releases include his bluegrass albums plus Jackson Browne's *Late for the Sky* and Gene Parsons' *Kindling*. Finally although not an acoustic accoutrement, White helped Gene Parsons invent the StringBender/B-Bender – the innovative B-string-pulling device first installed in White's 1954 Fender Telecaster.

Clarence White's bluegrass flatpicking can be experienced on *33 Guitar Instrumentals* and *Flatpick* – his blindingly fast fiddle lines executed on a 1935 Martin D-28, The power and the glory of this masterful musician was at least realised in part during his short but meaningful life. ■

Artist: Louise Day

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